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THE IDENTITY ISSUE

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Is In Her Enlightenment Era

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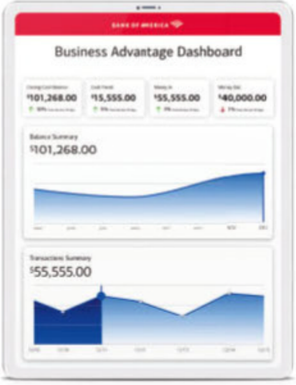
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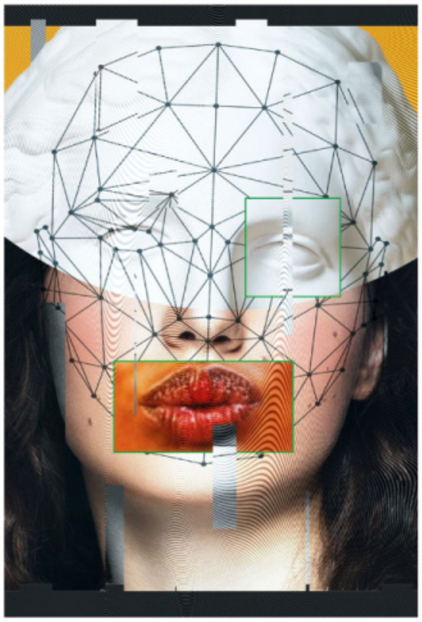

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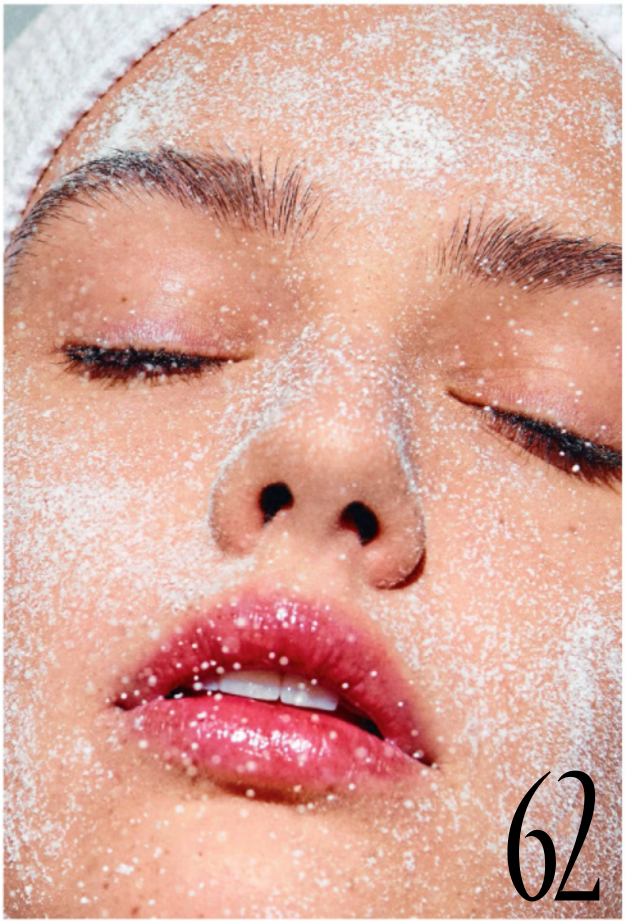

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Fashion Director: Sara Holzman.
Gabriela Hearst dress, Chanel Fine Jewelry earrings.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

What does identity mean in 2023? Is it who you are? How others see you? Who you want to be? Can your identity be lost? Changed? Taken from you? The following pages aim to answer these questions.

In *Beauty 3.0* (page 40), writer Mattie Kahn explores the ramifications of being able to choose how we represent ourselves physically online. On page 102, *Yellowjackets* star Liv Hewson addresses the challenge of playing their onscreen character, Van, while working out how to communicate their own identity to their castmates in real life. Then there are the eight women in our story *Seasoned Style* (page 96) who know exactly who they are, thanks to the decades of experience under their very fashionable belts.

As for this page, inspired by a prompt tied to Ernest Hemingway lore, I asked contributors to our Identity Issue to tell me their story in six words. Even our cover star, Kerry Washington—who is newly "prioritizing myself as the lead character of my own story," as she tells writer Jessica Herndon (page 70)—tackled my question. Put on the spot during our shoot, though, Washington came up with seven words, exclaiming, "You'll just have to accept it!"

I decided to let her get away with it, because that's just who I am.

Sally

Sally Holmes,
Editor in Chief

Capturing black skin in vibrant colors.♡

Breyona Holt, photographer

Nothing is impossible with your community.

Jenn Harper, founder of Cheekbone Beauty

I was curious so I asked.

Mattie Kahn, writer

Brown girl finds meaning in the journey.

Kerry Washington, actress, director, and producer

To expand my world, I read.

Andrea Stanley, Interim Executive Editor

Defining identity on my own terms.

Danielle Prescod, author and DEI consultant

TURNING PAIN AND JOY INTO ART.

Mari Andrew, author and illustrator

Working class boy just loves art.

David Graham, Creative Director

PHOTOS: JIMMY CHORNG, PHILIP FRIEDMAN, BREYONA HOLT, SCARLET RAVEN

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Alina Khan Has Found Her Joy

The 26-year-old has had a whirlwind year thanks to a breakout performance in Pakistani cinema. But for Khan, worldwide recognition has given her something more important than fame.

BY NEHA PRAKASH

The first time Alina Khan ran away from home she was 11. Khan, who was assigned male at birth, spent the early years of her childhood in Lahore, Pakistan, exploring her female gender identity—dressing up, role-playing as a girl. But that left her ostracized by her peers, neighbors, even her own family, leading her to run away multiple times throughout her early teens. At the age of 16, when the emotional and physical abuse at home became too much, she left for good, with no money and no plan. Eventually, she found shelter and guidance in the form of the "Khawaja Sira" community, a network of transgender individuals within Pakistan.

"People were constantly asking me why I am the way that I am," she says matter-of-factly in her native tongue Urdu, video-calling from a room in her manager's home in Pakistan. "At that time, I could not find a way to express that this was not something that I'm doing deliberately nor was this something I was making up. It was just me. There were no words to express this or no understanding of who I am or the identity that I have."

More than a decade later, it's her critically acclaimed role in the film *Joyland* that's given Khan the tools to lay bare her truth and bridge that gap.

Directed by Saim Sadiq, *Joyland* tells the story of a slowly fracturing family unit in Lahore, as its members push against gender norms amid a conservative backdrop. The story's driving force is a budding relationship between youngest son Haider (Ali Junejo) and Khan's Biba, an enigmatic and self-assured transgender woman determined to make a name for herself as the headlining performer at a local theater. It's a job Biba feels will give her the legitimacy and stability she wasn't guaranteed as a transgender woman.

Khan could see her own story reflected in Biba's on-screen arc. After running away from home, Khan worked as a dancer, eventually stumbling into acting in 2019. (Khan was performing at an NGO event where she met *Joyland* producer Sana Jafri, who at the time was working as the casting director on Sadiq's short film *Darling*.) It was Sadiq's vision of Biba that sold Khan on his project. "It was very attractive that a trans character was being shown as a strong, independent character who could fight for herself and who could stick to her morals and principles," she says. "What was most important for Biba was to display her talent in an honorable way, and that honorable way was working at the theater. For society to appreciate her."

The feature film premiered to incredible fanfare at the Cannes Film Festival in 2022, winning the Un Certain Regard jury prize as well as the Queer Palm (awarded to cinematic achievement in LGBTQ+ storytelling), and earning a prolonged standing ovation by the audience. Its mastery of character development and ability to oscillate between surprising humor and deep profoundness landed it on the shortlist for Best International Film for the 2023 Academy Awards—the first Pakistani film to do so. Despite not nabbing an official Oscar nomination, it bowled over viewers including notable South Asians, from Priyanka Chopra to Malala Yousafzai to Riz Ahmed, the latter two signing on as executive producers. It heads stateside this spring, making its theatrical debut in New York in April.

Khan believes the film has resonated worldwide in such a powerful way because of how it holds a mirror up to a patriarchal society—exposing the toxic nature of gender stereotypes and labels. "It was all very real, and it was all something that came out of this world that we live in," she says. "But all of the stories [in the movie] individually also reflect the truth of *that* world or of *that* character or of the moment that *they* exist in."

She also applauds it for showing "an honest portrayal of the trans community" as opposed to caricatures that have not only dominated Pakistani media—where it's commonplace for cisgender actors to play transgender characters—but also Western stories. Sadiq, Khan says, would ask her how she would respond in situations—like the scene in which Biba is discriminated against on public transportation, or when a romantic encounter between Biba and Haider turns sour—to ensure the storytelling felt true to life.

"Had I seen something like *Joyland* growing up, it would've answered a lot of questions about who I am."

Above: Khan at the Cannes Film Festival, May 2022. Left: with co-star Ali Junejo in Saim Sadiq's *Joyland*.

"I felt a lot of pride representing my community," she says, adding that she hopes her triumphs can be a "beacon of hope" for the transgender community.

But for as many barriers that *Joyland* has broken, its toughest battle sadly remains on its own turf. The film faced a nationwide ban in Pakistan in November 2022; after significant backlash, the ban was reversed. But at the time of print, the film remains forbidden in the region of Punjab, where the majority of the plot is set.

"*Joyland* is a movie that has been made by Punjabis—90 percent of the crew on the film is Punjabi or belongs to the province," says Khan. "It is a movie that's been made with Punjab in mind, and it's a heartbreaking thing for Punjab to actually not want to play it."

Khan is focusing on the positive, though. "It opens up a lot of opportunities for some very good directors in Pakistan to be confident enough to actually write roles for trans people," she says. "The mentality of a lot of commercial brands within the country will also change. They will begin to see trans people as people who can represent their brands, represent some commercial value in the market."

It has also changed her family's mentality. While the theatrical ban in Lahore has prevented her relatives from watching *Joyland* (they have, though, been able to see her in *Darling*), they've followed her newfound success, even reaching out to congratulate and reconnect with her.

What comes next—Khan is still figuring out. She hopes to supplement her income by teaching dance or becoming a choreographer, knowing she can't make enough of a living on just acting gigs—the Pakistani film industry isn't particularly lucrative, especially for up-and-comers—and though she is fielding a handful of international on-screen offers, it's more crucial to her, she says, to sustain an acting career in mainstream Pakistani media, playing roles for transgender women.

"Had I seen something like *Joyland* growing up, it would've answered a lot of questions for me about who I am, about my identity," says Khan. "More than [my acting] meaning something to other people, what's more important is what being a Pakistani trans woman actor means to me. Because it's only me who can look at my own life and see the difficulty and the hardships that I've gone through. I place a lot of value on where I've gotten in life and how I've, in some sense, made it out."

Of course she'd like to make it big as an actress. But she'd also just like to be able to buy a house. Khan explains that as a transgender woman in Pakistan, it's particularly hard to own property.

"All those years ago, I ran away from home with this desire to make an identity for myself and to find some space in the world and achieve great things in life," says Khan. "*Joyland* is the reason that I can now, again, resume some healthy relationships with my siblings, my family." And in that way, she has already found her home.

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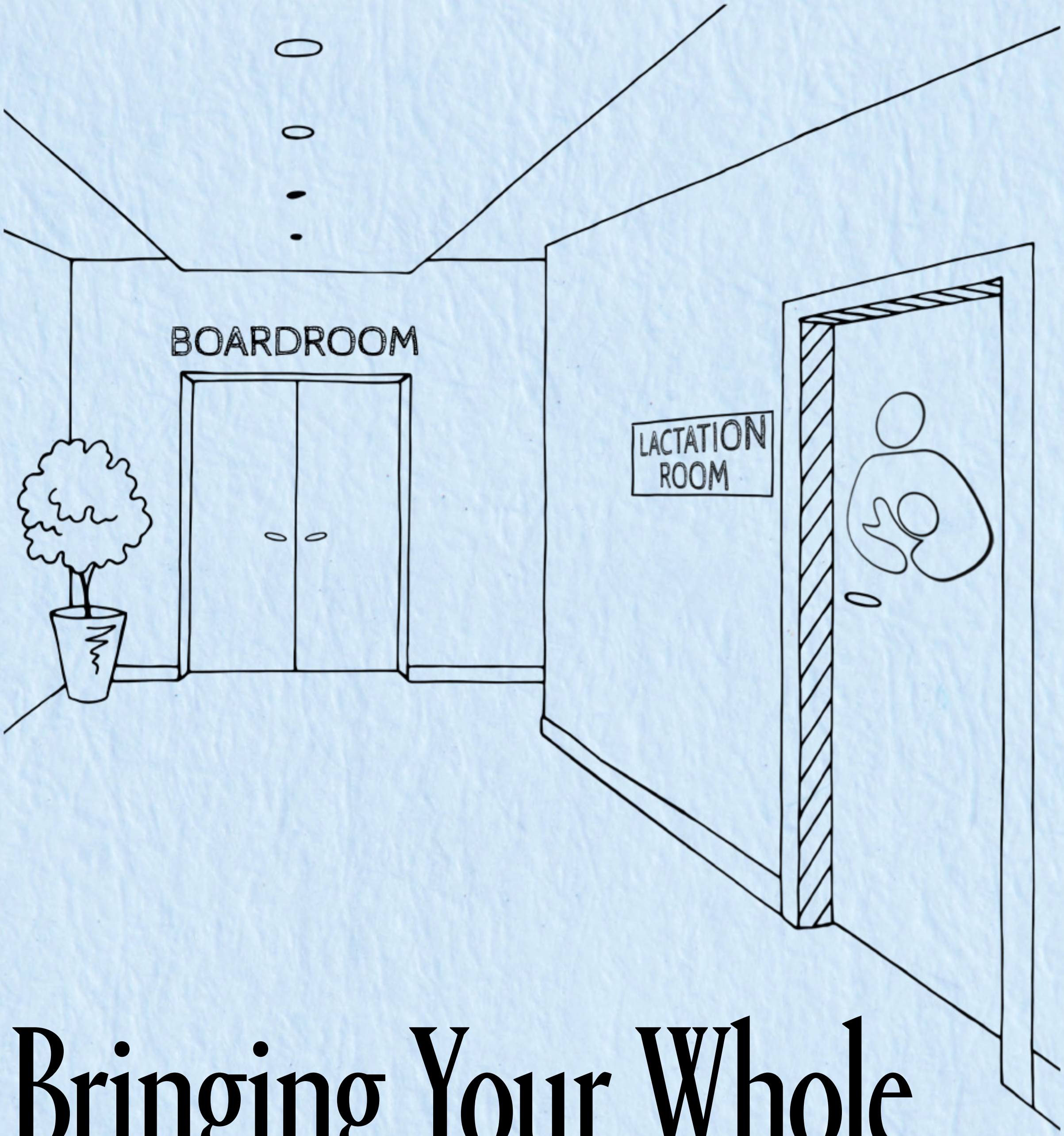
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Is Bringing Your Whole Self to Work a Trap?

The idea of being more "authentic" in the workplace has become increasingly popular. But for mothers, it can come with consequences.

BY MICHELLE EIGENHEER

The death of the Work Voice—that slightly sing-songy, totally fake tone most often used with co-workers, clients, and managers—happened a few years ago when TikTokers jumped on the trend of using their "real voices" versus their "customer service voices." The viral demonstration seemed like a challenge to the buttoned-up ways people felt pressured to present themselves at work during a time when so many people were clocking in from home. When pandemic puppies and meetings from bedrooms and awkward roommate cameos reminded bosses their employees were *people*.

But the rise of professionals opting to be more authentic at the office is part of a broader movement that began, at least in part, in 2018 when the book *Bring Your Whole Self to Work* by TEDx talker and corporate consultant Mike Robbins was published. The premise of the text centers on the idea that professionalism is a construct that forces workers to inhabit personas that suppress aspects of themselves in order to fit into the workplace. Many companies, especially those in the tech sector, became some of the authenticity movement's biggest acolytes. And just like that, we started friending our managers on social media; our colleagues became family.

> "Employers routinely prefer unencumbered workers. Ignoring this reality is naive at best."

Which sounds good. Except that for many people— especially those from underrepresented communities—openly sharing their full lives in the workplace can open them up to bias. "The concept of bringing your whole self to work ignores that our whole selves have not been welcomed or supported in the workplace," says Daphne Delvaux, an attorney whose San Diego-based law firm Delvaux Law is focused on protecting women at work. "My days are filled with calls from people who dared to show their whole selves at work and found themselves fired. Whether their whole selves encompass pregnancy, caretaking responsibilities, disability restrictions, or age, employers routinely prefer unencumbered workers. Ignoring this reality is naive at best, and legally reckless at worst."

For mothers, this is woefully true. There is a "pervasive anti-motherhood bias in the workplace," says Delvaux. It's often referred to as the "maternal wall." Just look at pay disparities: in households where both parents of school-age children are working full-time, the mother makes 73 cents for each dollar a father makes, according to data from the U.S. Department of Labor. That's larger than the overall gender wage gap of 83 cents per dollar. And in a 2021 study from London South Bank University, pregnant women reported missing out on promotions and pay raises, and being subjected to microaggressions from colleagues who questioned their competency, which included making comments about their "pregnancy brain."

Moms we've spoken with have reported how their pregnancies have made some co-workers tense or uncomfortable. One recalled returning to work after parental leave, only to find her manager blatantly reading a book titled *Childfree by Choice* right before their first meeting. Such encounters make it harder for mothers to feel safe enough to allow themselves to be truly seen.

"Authenticity, on its face, it's such a positive thing," says Erin Thomas, Ph.D., head of diversity, inclusion, & belonging at Upwork, the global hiring marketplace. But critical nuance is left out of these shiny one-liners and that can lead to misinterpretation, she adds.

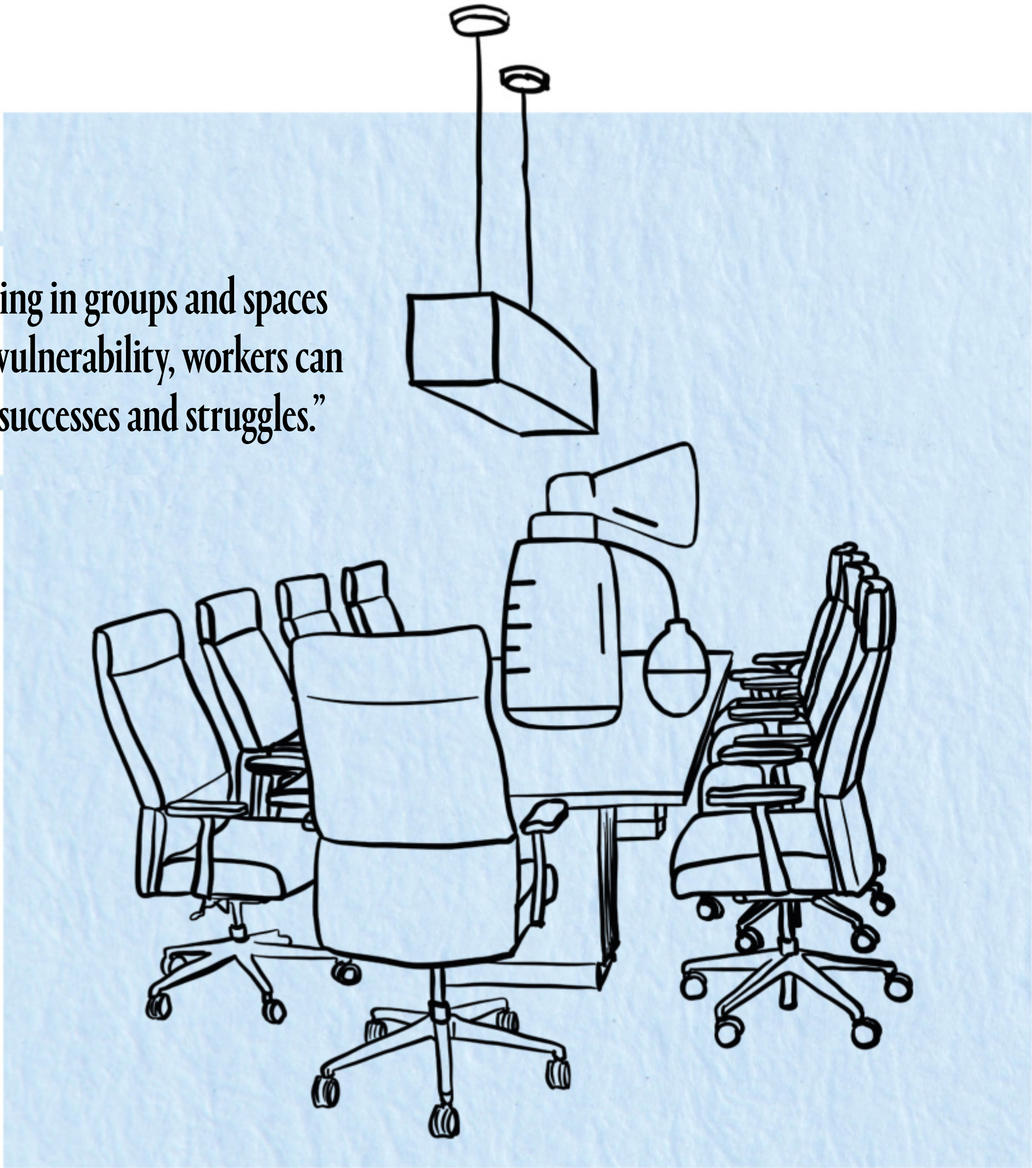
Tricia Montalvo Timm, a Latina executive, lawyer, board director, and mother of two daughters, says she's dealt with this dilemma for decades. "Hiding who I was as a working mother, hiding my cultural heritage—all of that takes a huge emotional toll," says Timm, who works in Silicon Valley. "It is both emotionally and physically exhausting."

Every interaction became a calculus for her: *Would mentioning her family vacation remind colleagues she's a mother? Would she be seen as unreliable if she blocked out time to drive her kids to school each morning?* "You walk into every meeting and conversation adapting who you are," says Timm. "You put on layers and layers of armor to protect yourself. Over time, that armor becomes really heavy."

The experience led Timm to write a book, *Embrace the Power of You: Owning Your Identity at Work*. Published in March of this year, it lays out her journey with diversity, equity, and inclusion advocacy and offers a road map for navigating identity issues in the workforce. "We all want to belong; it's human nature," says Timm. "But when you are the different one in the room, you feel like an outsider."

But just because mothers (or anyone!) can't always bring their full selves to work doesn't mean they shouldn't be able to. Lauren Smith Brody, CEO and founder of The Fifth Trimester, a book and now a gender equity consultancy, and co-founder of the Chamber of Mothers, a nonprofit that brings mothers together to advocate for their rights, stresses the power that employee resource groups (ERGs) — sometimes called affinity groups — can have in shaping company culture. ERGs have become popular since the pandemic, as employers have sought ways to maintain a sense of unity amid the rise of remote work.

While writing her book, Brody interviewed and surveyed nearly 800 mothers who all reported



> “By connecting in groups and spaces designed for vulnerability, workers can find shared successes and struggles.”

different versions of the same feeling: guilt. Some of it came from within—guilt about changing priorities, taking more days off work or not spending enough time with a new baby—but the guilt is external, too: Guilt from being constantly questioned about dedication to the job, availability, or taking family leave. “Everybody felt guilty,” says Brody. “Like nine times out of 10, it was because they thought something was wrong with them when really the system was not allowing them to succeed.”

By connecting in groups and spaces designed for vulnerability, workers can find shared successes, struggles, and the common denominators that become recommendations for systemic change within a company, explains Brody. And in the absence of robust federal legislation, these groups can have real power. Protections for working mothers are often at the hands of individual lawmakers, and the employers themselves, so it matters who has a voice within a company.

When workers find these peer groups, it can make all the difference. Raquel Gervasio returned to work after staying home for six years to care for her twins. She applied to Zoox, an Amazon subsidiary building robotaxis, which instituted a returnship program that offered extra steps to make sure she was welcomed back into the workplace and given support. That meant weekly check-ins with her manager where they addressed challenging topics, like what to do when feeling overwhelmed with mom guilt. “Having these conversations made me feel seen,” says Gervasio. She didn’t feel she had to hide, but could show up as her “true authentic self.”

But stories like Gervasio’s are not always the norm. And until companies create the type of systemic change that is needed to make sure everyone is free to be themselves, the onus remains on mothers to decide if they feel comfortable being as authentic as a child-free person. Often leaving them to question: Is the environment I’m working in safe? If I encounter resistance, do I have the tools and support to get through it? If the reception is not as I hope, what are my options? Can I show up to work today, as—me? **mc**

ART BY DAVID GRAHAM. PHOTOS: GETTY

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Ruby

With a warm and spicy profile that's both sultry and a bit smoldering, ***Tom Ford Cherry Smoke Eau de Parfum ($240)*** will surround you in a cloud of red. The richness of the fiery shade has the power to bring out your seductive side and help you laser focus on your mission, romantic or otherwise. "To wear red is to sit in your power and know your worth," says Merrick. "It's femininity—on your terms."

TOM FORD
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Eau d'Aura

Your scent and your aura are more closely connected than you might think. A blend of notes can help you evoke emotions, set intentions, and embody an energy. With guidance from psychic, aura reader, and founder of Aura Wear, Susanna Merrick, we've picked the perfect scents to put you in the mood.

BY SAMANTHA HOLENDER **PHOTOGRAPHS BY** NEIL GODWIN **STYLING** KAREN WHITEHEAD

Violet

Chloé's Rose Naturelle Intense Eau de Parfum ($110) is on a mission to minimize environmental impact via a 100 percent natural origin composition, which is what makes it the perfume equivalent of the color violet. As Merrick explains, violet auras emanate from humanitarians. "Violets are visionaries with big dreams, goals, and intense intuition," she says. "They want to change the world." There's a powerful alignment from a scent standpoint, too. Fresh bergamot and vanilla-scented oak wood epitomize violet, marrying crispness (blue) and warmth (red).

Magenta

Magenta has a dash of purple, a splash of pink, a pinch of red; the aura color is a beautiful melting pot. "Magenta people are eclectic," says Merrick. "A magenta aura will have a perfume that combines everything they like without a care in the world of what anyone thinks." Enter Eauso Vert Joga ($165), a gorgeously chaotic jumble of notes ranging from Italian bergamot and black pepper to vetiver and jasmine. It technically falls into the citrus-floral category, but maintains an earthy edge and hint of spice. It's this fusion of fragrance families that aligns with Magenta's "surprising" profile.

PHLUR
PHLUR
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BOY
EAU DE PARFUM

Tangerine

"To be orange is to be a big risk taker," explains Merrick. It's a color that encompasses one's ability to seize the moment and be a trendsetter. Phlur Tangerine Boy Eau de Parfum ($96), which uses 100 percent sustainably sourced pure fruit extracts, is a literal representation of orange, but it also checks off every figurative box. The unisex blend places tangerine at the heart, jump-starting the senses with a zing. Its zesty citrus profile exudes candor and straightforwardness.

M+
Molecule 01
+ Guaiac Wood
Escentric Molecules

Turquoise

A bit more whimsical than classic blue, a turquoise aura oozes spirituality and represents a deep connection to nature. Think: “Earthy, bohemian babies,” says Merrick. From a fragrance standpoint, turquoise energy is amplified by woody notes. Take the Molecule 01 + Guaiac Wood from Escentric Molecules ($145), a deconstructed scent that harnesses the smokiness of the Palo Santo tree. The wild plant, native to the Yucatán Peninsula and Peru, has been used for centuries by shamans, monks, and healers to create a stronger connection to the world.

LOEWE
EARTH

Emerald

A deep green energy shouldn't be confused with a flower-child-frolicking-in-the-field feel. It's the opposite. "A green aura means you're elegant, you're worldly, and you're expensive," says Merrick. "It's your Jackie-O vibe." To elicit assured sophistication, seek out scents that blend floral and musk, like Loewe Earth Eau de Parfum ($169). Its composition draws inspiration from nature, blending soft and powdery violet with the freshness of pear and elemi, a hint of musk, and the unmistakable oakiness of truffle.

Can't stop loving You by Kilian

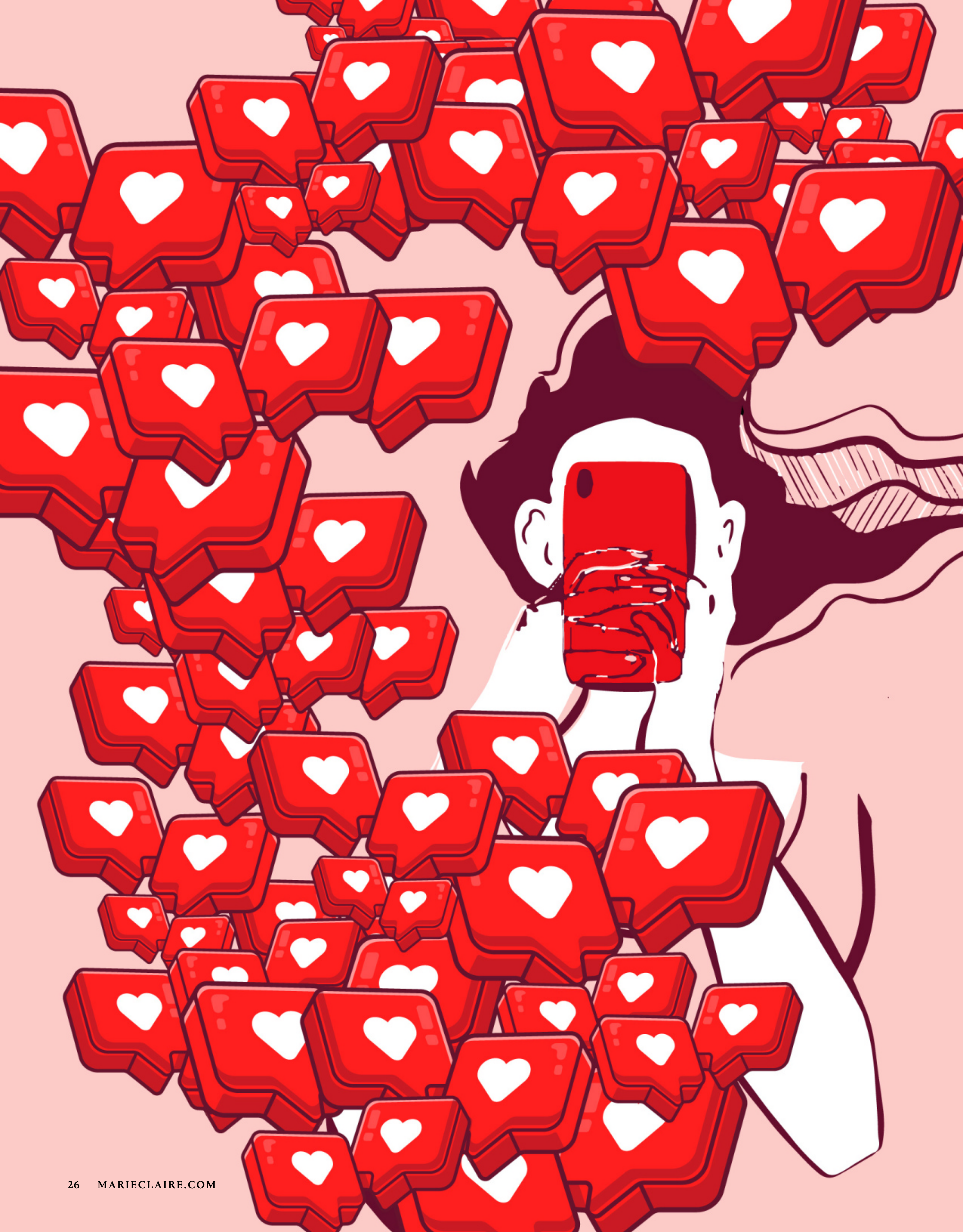
Blush

North African Orange Blossom, a long-held symbol for eternal love, fittingly takes center stage in Can't Stop Loving You by Kilian ($265), a scent that epitomizes the "self-care centric" and "girly" pink aura. The floral blend, which balances traditionally feminine notes like jasmine and honey with the intense sensuality of labdanum cistus, a warm amber-scented gum, will instantly transport you to an undeniably chic vintage powder room. It's the manifestation of divine feminine energy, and a single spritz will persuade you to set aside more me-time.

Cobalt

Equal parts spicy, mineral, and aquatic, Amouage Lineage ($360) is the personification of the "effortless" blue aura. "Blue energy comes from someone who is super casual and clean cut," says Merrick. "A blue perfume is comforting—not fussy." Once your nose gets a whiff of Lineage's fresh yet complex profile, you'll have that ah-hah understanding of the color's energy. The marriage of lemon-tinged Sichuan pepper and sharp ginger with a warm, aromatic base creates a subtle, intoxicating scent.

AMOUAGE
LINEAGE



I Soft-Launched My Bisexuality During the Pandemic

Now, years later, one writer reflects on what it was like to share her identity with others while in isolation. And what happened next.

BY ANDREA BARTZ

On October 25, 2020, my finger hovered over Instagram's Post button. I was about to share a series of selfies I'd taken with Julia, the woman I'd begun dating a couple months earlier—in them, we were on her rooftop, our faces close together, cracking up as we failed to center ourselves in the frame.

I'd told a few close friends about her. The rest of the world had no idea about her existence; no idea I was attracted to women, period. Among my 8,000 or so Instagram followers: my conservative parents, religious family, professional contacts, friends from all walks of life, strangers who followed me after reading my thriller books. The caption wasn't a heartfelt Coming Out. It didn't even identify Julia as my girlfriend ("Bad at selfies," it read, because self-deprecation is my defense mechanism.) Still, our intimacy was obvious; people would know, or at least suspect, the truth. I hesitated, aware that this one casual Instagram could forever change how people think of me.

Then I hit Post, flung my phone face-down on my bed, and vowed not to check it for the rest of the day.

I'm 36 years old and I've lived in New York City all of my adult life—two elements that make a this-late-in-life revelation unusual, if not unbelievable to some people. I had my first serious boyfriend two decades ago; through college, my 20s, and the first half of my 30s, I identified as straight. I couldn't possibly be queer, I figured, since I was attracted to men.

It really did seem that simple. I grew up in a conservative Lutheran church where the pastor once used his Christmas Eve service to rail against society's acceptance of homosexuality. As a kid, I had pinups of Jonathan Taylor Thomas and Devon Sawa on my wall, and as a teenager I joined my friends in lusting after Jude Law and Will Smith. So I ignored all the signs that my sexuality might not be so cut-and-dry: the fact that I had crushes on women as well as men, my inexplicable fascination with a group of gorgeous actresses who all looked alike, sexual fantasies with nary a penis present. Wasn't that "normal"? Isn't it practically a cliché for straight women to prefer lesbian porn?

So I continued to date men. Years ago, I opened up to my therapist about yet another crush I'd developed on a woman: I was scared to act on it because, without any past experience, I might inadvertently "lead her on" only to eventually, hypothetically, decide I wanted to be with a man.

"So you're afraid that after getting to know someone and dating for a little while, you might want to end it, and that's unfair to them," she paraphrased back. I nodded. She tilted her head. "Isn't that just…dating?"

She was right. Which I knew then. But it was another two years before I found the courage to sit across from a woman, two beers on the table between us, trying to decide if the spark was there.

The catalyst, ironically, was a tragic and horrifying global pandemic—an upending of all the rules, when our mores and housing situations and lives were all tossed into a blender. In early 2020, lonely in my studio apartment, I packed a suitcase and moved in with a friend and her family near Washington, DC—"for a couple weeks," I assured them, before staying for five months.

I saw my therapist via Zoom and she listened to me cry about having to put mate-seeking on hold in my mid-30s. All my close friends were getting married, having kids. I already felt like the unsporty kid picked last for the baseball team. And then the whole season was called off! The injustice.

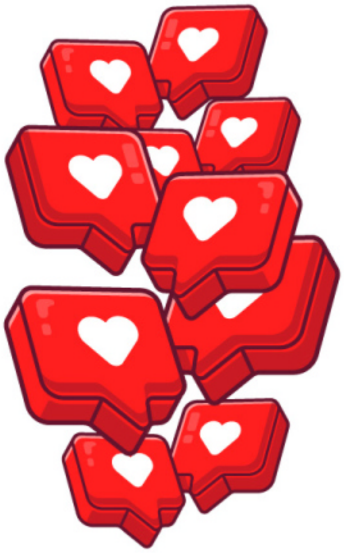
"You're 15 minutes from a big city and you can meet people outdoors," she said. "Why not go on a few dates? If nothing else, it'll be good fodder for therapy."

So I reinstalled Hinge. After a moment's hesitation, I set it to show me both men and women. I went on exactly one first date, with Julia, and the rest is history.

I'm sure geography had something to do with it, the fact that I could clarify in my profile that I was still paying rent in New York City. *Hey, no one can accuse me of wasting their time or leading them on!* But more importantly, I already felt like my identity was in flux, devoid of its usual constellation of people, places, and things. I was an author who couldn't promote her new book. A friend hundreds of miles from her closest buds. A daughter who hadn't been home since mid-2019. Why not *finally* take the leap and shake up this part of my self-image, too?

I was terrified, of course. First I stopped replying to Julia's messages on the app, only to reemerge weeks later on a fresh surge of bravery. Then, the day of our date, my heart hammered in my chest the entire drive to the restaurant where we were meeting. But the panic mellowed as we drained our drinks and the afternoon shadows stretched across the patio. I tipsily texted a friend on the cab ride home: *I just had the best date!!!* I was giddy and energized, exactly the way I felt after any promising meet-up.

I never came out. I simply fell in love with Julia and figured others would get the memo when they got the memo. People interpreted my selfies however they wanted. I'm sure some text threads among my contacts lit up with speculation, but hey, I didn't have to hear about it. My friends were supportive, if, as they later admitted, a bit bewildered. My parents took longer to get used to it, but they had plenty of time and space to handle the news on their own.



"I'm forgiving myself for taking this long to listen to my gut and live authentically."

Perhaps part of why I soft-launched my relationship (and, in turn, my sexual orientation) is that I was worried about people raising their eyebrows, so I wanted to keep everyone else out of it. Like every couple in a new relationship, Julia and I formed our own blissful cocoon, blocking out the world as we fell harder and harder. In fact, with big gatherings still verboten and casual dating still risky business, we leaped right over the zingy period where you dress up and see each other for sexy dates a couple times a week and fast-forwarded to the part where we spent weeks together, wearing sweatpants and trying recipes and binge-watching the latest Netflix hit.

In many ways, it was scary to uncover a new part of my identity in my 30s, and I feel less entitled to call myself part of the queer community. I didn't come out as an awkward teen or face overt homophobia. And with the world on lockdown, I couldn't join queer bowling leagues or celebrate Pride weekend with scores of LGBTQ+ folks. My partner describes coming out in her early 20s and finding her closest friends—and her identity—in DC's queer scene. But for me, that ship has sailed: I already have my chosen family, primarily straight women, many of whom now have husbands and kids. They're on the path I thought my life would take. And it's weird, unmooring, to be switching lanes when I otherwise know myself so well.

My new novel, *The Spare Room* (out June 20), stars a 30-something who recognizes her own bisexuality in the isolated enclave of lockdown, and through her, I worked through some of my own bafflement, self-doubt, and eventual acceptance. (Then she gets sucked into the betrayals, lies, and secrets of the couple she's fallen in love with, because it's a thriller—but the coming-out stuff is semi-autobiographical.) My heroine grieves the loss of her certitude that life would wind like a river into the American ideal, and I feel that: it's alarming to wake up and realize that the images pasted on your vision board aren't totally your own.

For so long I thought my happy ending would be me posing in a yard with two gorgeous children and my tall, handsome husband, a big house behind us and a nice car out front, two-dimensional perfection for all the world to see, she muses. *But did I ever really want that? Or did I accept the only future that was available to me as a kid growing up in Libertyville, the ultimate M.A.S.H.-game prophecy hanging low like a ticket at a deli counter?*

I'm still figuring that out, and accepting that I can never totally disentangle my dreams from society's expectations. I'm forgiving myself for taking this long to listen to my gut and live authentically. *The Spare Room* opens with a dedication: *For everyone who rethought everything.* I know I'm not alone in suddenly realizing my life didn't have to be what I thought it was—and I hope everyone else is lucky enough to have that awakening, too. **mc**

ART: DAVID GRAHAM

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THE NATURAL WORLD. UNFOLD AND DISCOVER OUR VISION FOR

SMALL BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT:

CHEEKBONE BEAUTY

How founder Jenn Harper brings Indigenous principles to the cosmetic industry.

BY FAITH CUMMINGS

The idea for Cheekbone Beauty came to Jenn Harper in January 2015 in a dream. "I had a literal pop-out-of-the-bed-in-the-middle-of-the-night dream, where Indigenous girls like me were covered in lip gloss," she says. "They had the rosiest little cheeks and I remember them filled with joy, and laughter." After waking up from that powerful and vibrant vision, Harper immediately grabbed her laptop to figure out how to make a lip gloss, while also making sure she was doing good with the profits it made. She ultimately wanted to make something in honor of her grandmother.

The name came to Harper that fall, as she was listening to a business podcast with Spanx founder Sara Blakely. In it, Blakely shared the memorability of the "K" sound, which inspired Harper. That tidbit, combined with research that people with high cheekbones are considered more trustworthy (and it is a beloved facial feature within Harper's own Ojibwe community) was all she needed to forge ahead. And thus, Cheekbone Beauty, an Indigenous-owned and -founded cosmetics company, was born in 2016.

Cheekbone Beauty takes its Indigenous philosophy seriously—from the formulations that use millennia-old ingredients intrinsic to Native cultures to its customer-service approach, which hinges on allyship. "Our worldview of supporting the community is a vital part of Indigenous culture," says Harper. "We don't define success as attaining things for yourself, but about what you can do for those around you."

On Funding

"I had this internal battle going on because I don't have money and I don't come from generational wealth. In business, they call it the friends-and-family round, but my friends and family don't have money.

Thankfully, we found investors and the more I got to know them, I realized they really weren't investing in the business at first—they were investing in me. I don't have a fancy business degree and I dropped out of college, so it's about work and the passion for me.

We were so fortunate to be on *Dragons' Den*, Canada's version of *Shark Tank*. At the time, our investors were new to the funding world and were known as social-impact investors, as well as being Indigenous-led, which was huge. I'm not sure we would've got investment without their funding."

On Being Progressive

"We've made the choice as a brand to not speak to every social issue, even though we care about social movements—that's what our brand is all about. We want to be a soft place for every human being to land.

We do a lot of content around our Indigenous culture and language. And we make mistakes, but we will always humbly apologize. The whole point of us sharing language is that it was robbed from many grandmothers, including mine. To use one of our words as a lipstick name means that we are adding an Indigenous word on the lips of anyone who chooses to wear it."

Jenn Harper's brand takes inspiration from, and champions, her Indigenous culture and language.

PHOTOS: COURTNEY MICHAUD, CHEEKBONE BEAUTY

"We don't define success as attaining things for yourself, but what you can do for those around you."

On Healing From Trauma

"Just two months prior to launching Cheekbone, I became sober after battling alcoholism for many years. While getting sober, I learned about my grandparents' experiences at residential boarding schools—the school system that was created by the government and church during colonization in the U.S. and Canada to assimilate Indigenous and First Peoples children into a more European way of life. There were so many negative impacts about those systems, and reporting from *The New York Times* showed the discovery of bodies of Native children in unmarked graves. It's truly tragic, but it helped me to better understand my grandmother's story."

On Measuring Your Passion Meter

"If you're going to wake up at 3 a.m. and do something for the business you want to build, then you're good. Keep going. Then commit to it every single day with consistency. I've woken up for the past six years to do something to move the Cheekbone business forward. If you have that passion, it's sure to succeed." **mc**

BALLY

"To me, identity in fashion means heritage, confidence, and intelligence," says Creative Director Rhuigi Villaseñor.

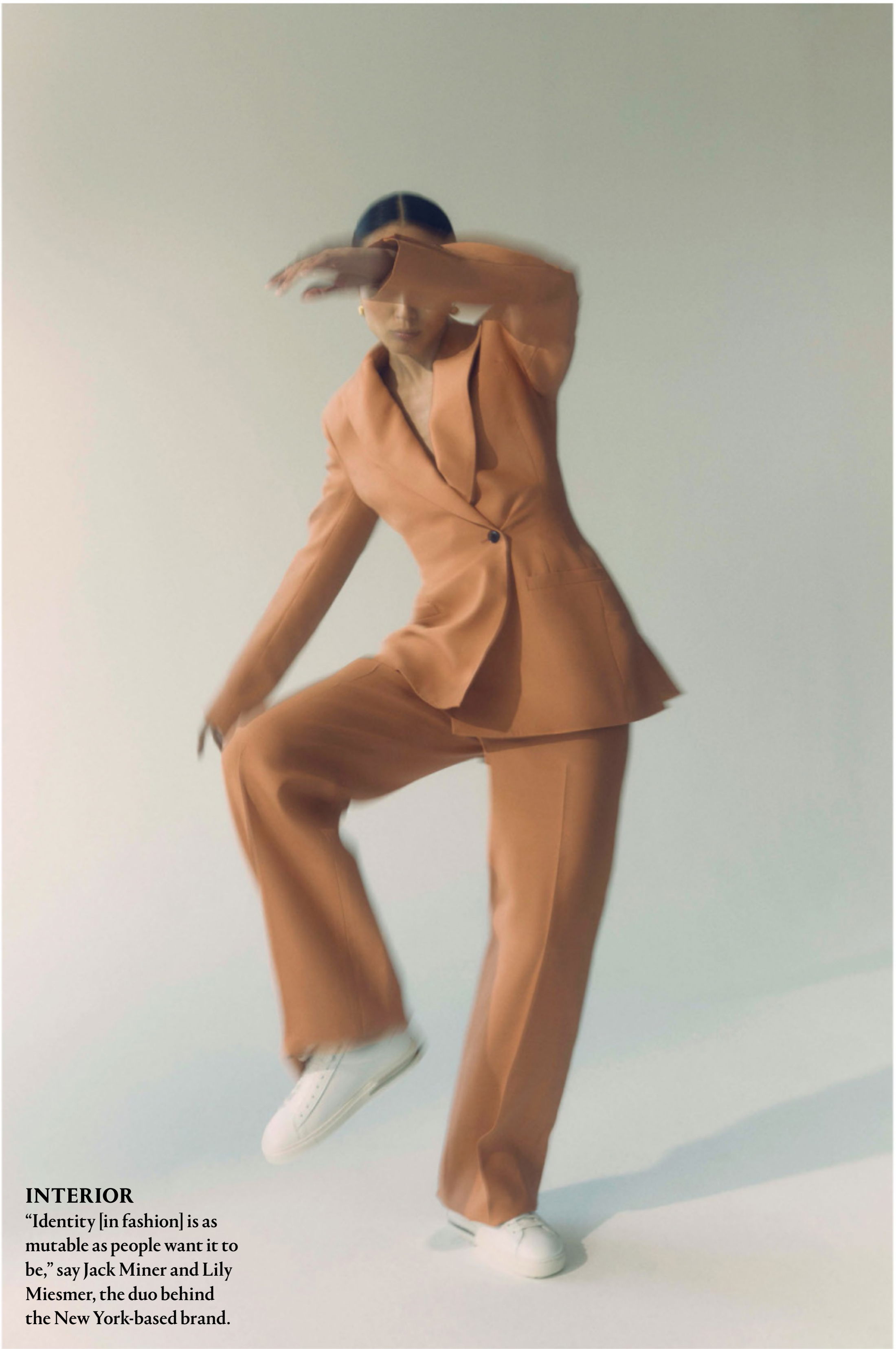
This page: Bally top and pants; Jenny Bird earrings. Opposite page: Kallmeyer vest and pants suit; Stuart Weitzman shoes; Prounis earrings.

Identity by Design

STYLED BY SARA HOLZMAN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LELANIE FOSTER

By weaving their own stories into their collections, designers can forge communities, be change agents, and inspire self-exploration in others. That intimacy can be powerful, especially for independent designers growing their labels and new-guard creative directors shaking up traditional house codes. Here, nine designers fashioning their brand identities.

KALLMEYER
"As a queer woman raised by strong matriarchs, my personal life and career have been made up of constant conversations that create and hold space for my evolution and that of my community," designer Daniella Kallmeyer says.



INTERIOR
“Identity [in fashion] is as mutable as people want it to be,” say Jack Miner and Lily Miesmer, the duo behind the New York-based brand.

This page: Interior jacket and pants; Birkenstock shoes; Prounis earrings. Opposite page: Diotima jacket and pants; Prounis earrings.

DIOTIMA

"Fashion is a language," shares founder Rachel Scott."It's an intimate and tangible visual manifestation of who we are and how we want to be seen and understood."

PUPPETS AND PUPPETS

Building a brand's DNA inevitably reflects you, says Carly Mark, designer of the art-meets-fashion label. "That alignment, genuineness, and vulnerability make people connect [with a brand]."

Puppets and Puppets jumpsuit; Arielle Ratner earrings.

ANGEL CHANG

“Identity for me is being inspired by my ancestral past and seeing how it has formed who I am today,” says the eponymous designer. “Identity is searching deep into our souls and expressing who we really truly are.”

Angel Chang jacket, top, and pants; Birkenstock shoes; Jenny Bird earrings.

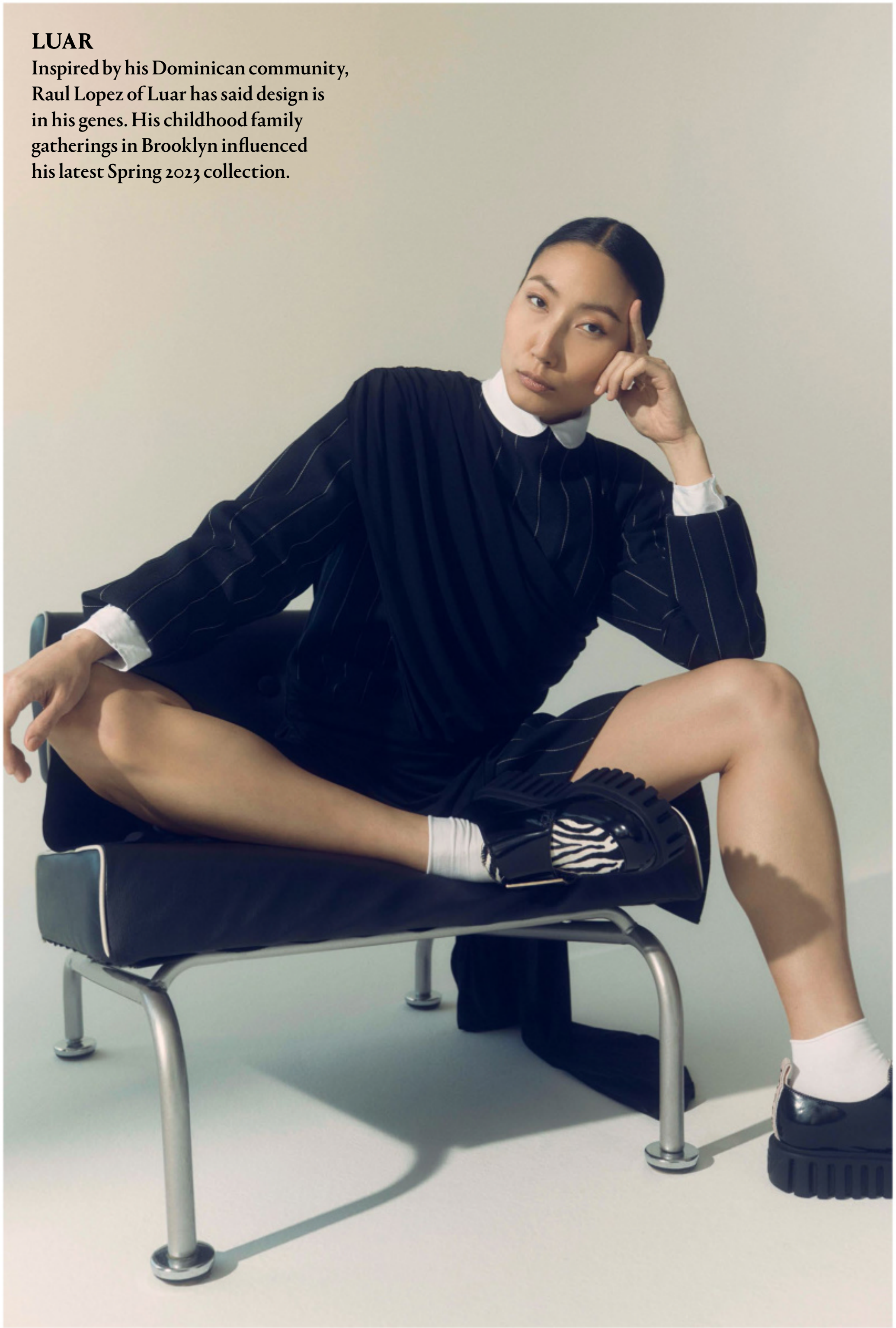
LÙCHEN

For Lu Chen and Jacky Luo of Lùchen, meticulous craftsmanship is at the heart of their label.

Lùchen dress

LUAR

Inspired by his Dominican community, Raul Lopez of Luar has said design is in his genes. His childhood family gatherings in Brooklyn influenced his latest Spring 2023 collection.



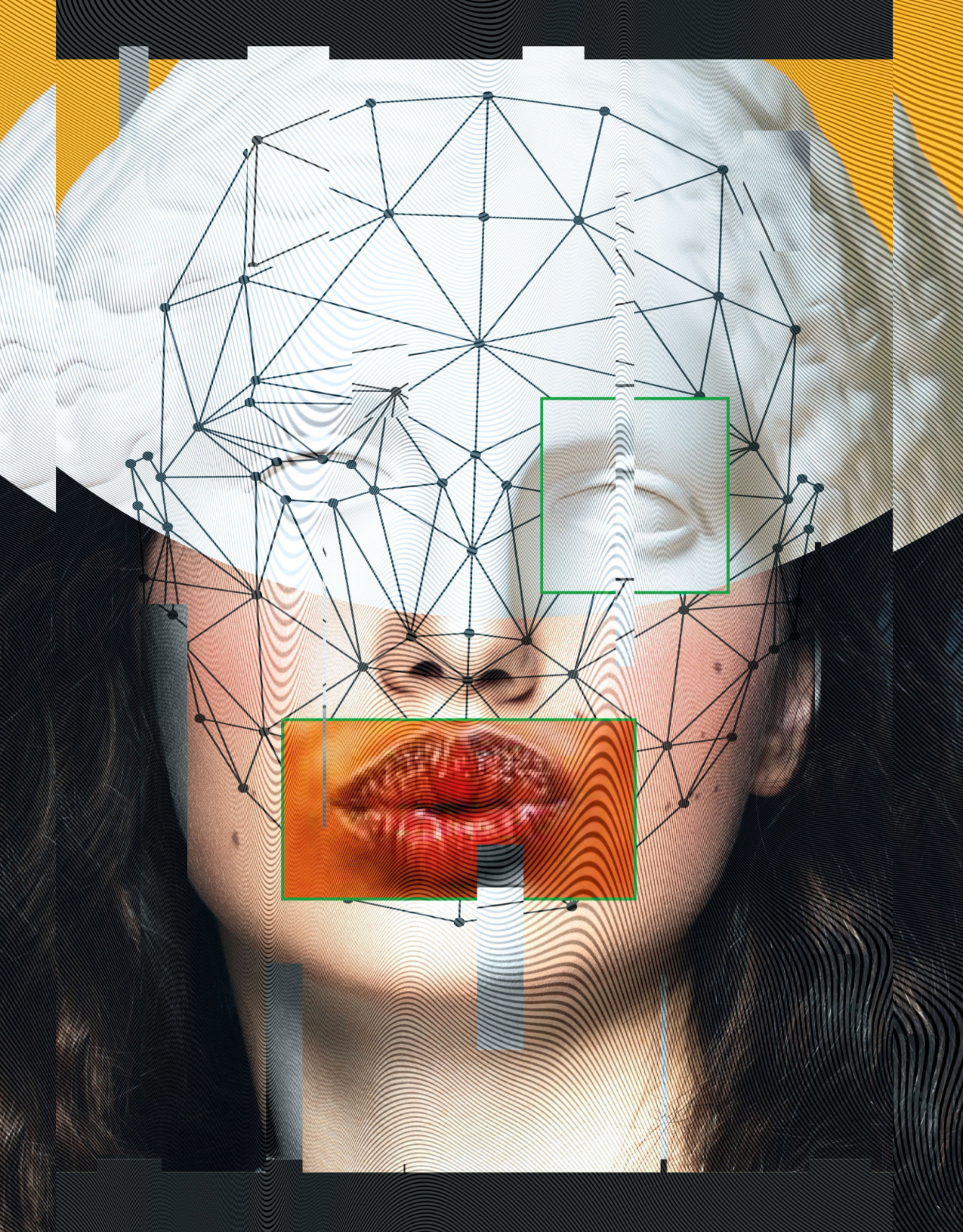
This page: Luar dress; A'Court top; model's own socks; Roger Vivier shoes.
Opposite page: Ferragamo jacket, top, shorts, and shoes; model's own socks.

FERRAGAMO

In his new role as Creative Director of Ferragamo, Maximilian Davis is putting his own spin on the heritage Florentine brand.

Model: Bo Bay Park at Marilyn NYC
Hair: Takuya Yamaguchi at The Wall Group
Makeup: Ayaka Nihei
Production: Samantha Rockman

For pricing and where to buy information, see page 113.



Beauty 3.0

In the metaverse, we can be whoever we want to be. Is that a good thing?

BY MATTIE KAHN

Giselle Mota could see pale complexions and slim hips. She glimpsed fine, straight hair and a parade of bodies that bore little resemblance to her own. She has built her career in emerging technologies, so it's no shock to her to realize she is the sole woman of color—and sometimes, woman, period—in a room.

But the problem this time was different. Here was a room to which she could not gain access at all.

Mota wasn't rooting around for her ticket to an exclusive conference or hoping for an invite to an important meeting. She was trying to build an avatar to enter a digital universe—one of a growing number that allows users to experience alternate realities in a virtual landscape. But Mota, an entrepreneur and futurist, couldn't make one. She is a Black woman. These avatars seemed to hail from Scandinavia.

"No one like me," Mota recalls, with a rueful laugh. "Nothing kind of short, stout, with big hair. No big lips, curves. None of that."

The metaverse—a catch-all term that describes virtual communities that allow users to move in space and often socialize—has been hailed as the next frontier in internet exploration. Its promise drove Facebook to rebrand as Meta and unveil its Horizon Worlds initiative. (So far, the bet has not paid off. The platform has somehow lost 100,000 users since its launch in 2021; it didn't have tons to begin with.) Roblox is better positioned. Its 58 million active users enter 3D immersive environments with friends or to meet new people. Its stock surged at the start of 2023, reflecting better-than-expected revenue; a recent trend report seems to attribute at least some of that success to increased interest in Roblox clothes and accessories.

The metaverse perhaps sounds remote to those of us who've never ventured into *Fortnite,* but the augmented and virtual realities that make it possible have become an inextricable part of the internet. That Instagram filter that turns cheeks cherub pink or the AI-generated portraits that flooded feeds in late 2022 or the cartoon-character emoji that moms love to weaponize in the group chat—that's the metaverse at work. You have used it and been charmed. And so I know that what the researchers say is true: It's just a matter of time before people like us agonize over which nose in a list of AI-tabulated options most approximates our own (or at least help a friend assess her pixelated nostrils).

In doctors' offices, where patients have been known to bring screenshots of their filtered faces into consultations, the future is now. It's evident in classrooms, with some teenagers finding more satisfaction in their digital identities than in reality. According to 2022 research from Razorfish and VICE Media Group, over half of Gen Z gamers reported feeling more like themselves in the metaverse. A collaboration between Squarespace and the Harris Poll in 2021 revealed that at least 60 percent of Gen Z believes how people present themselves online matters more than their in-person behavior.

People like Mota see the possibilities in these developments. But of course, people like Mota also know their potential for peril. What do we want from our avatars? And how is the funhouse mirror of the metaverse distorting how we see ourselves IRL?

The metaverse is too new for researchers to have a precise answer to such questions. But social media has been better scrutinized. Meta's own research concluded that Instagram was toxic for girls, making them feel worse about their bodies. The use of filters across platforms has emphasized impossible aesthetic standards and warped people's sense of themselves—with perfection just a few taps and swipes out of reach. It remains to be seen just how those forces operate in the metaverse, which is at once more "unreal" than social media and more immersive.

"Girls and women have long been socialized to focus on their appearance and monitor their appearance," explains Sophia Choukas-Bradley, Ph.D., a licensed clinical psychologist and director of the Teen and Young Adult Lab at the University of Pittsburgh. "And so a lot of the basic idea of people changing their appearance through makeup and cosmetics of all kinds and hair products, clothing isn't new."

What is new—as Choukas-Bradley sees it—is that "the advent of social media has allowed people to Photoshop themselves and present this edited, fake version of themselves to a broad audience and then receive quantifiable approval." She worries avatars take that impulse a step further and in the process "create more of a gap between what we perceive as our ideal self and what we in fact look like."

In the world of the metaverse, perhaps that distant disconnect doesn't feel so uncomfortable. But the metaverse is still a place we go, not a place we live. Sooner or later, its users have to log off.

I was born in 1992, which makes me a millennial to the marrow. I made a Facebook account in high school. I grew up using disposable cameras, not to be cool or arch but because that is how we took photos. I never learned to film video content, and I never will. The closest I have ever come to entering the metaverse is experimenting with the dog-ears filter in Snapchat. (I did it once or twice. Delightful!)

Until now. I meet Mindy Jafek—a Roblox representative, who has offered to function as a metaverse Virgil—via Zoom. For the uninitiated: Roblox is a platform and an app that allows users to interact, chat, create games, and enter existent ones all within the Roblox world. I want to get a sense of what it's like to explore, so Jafek whisks me off into the world of her avatars and characters.

Jafek has a "pop punk" humanoid avatar that she favors when she wants to channel middle-school "Avril Lavigne vibes" and an avatar that looks like a cross between a LEGO person and a thumb. She can make her skin pink or purple or blue.

Later, Jenni Svoboda, a digital fashion designer known as Lovespun on Roblox, tells me that users often like having a range of characters to pull from to express varied moods. When Svoboda wants to communicate, she swaps in a new face—goth, glam, excited, or tired.

The fact that the metaverse sanctions that kind of shape-shifting is a quirk that makes some researchers feel optimistic. Social media has, until now, emphasized one idealized self; immersive worlds like Roblox make the mask obvious. In an email, Adam Alter, Ph.D., a professor of marketing at New York University's Stern School of Business and the author of *Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping Us Hooked*, notes the difference: "On Instagram, for example, you see the very best slices of everyone else's life, and they manicure their appearances with filters that aren't always obvious to the naked eye. As a result, you see one hyper-attractive person after another living a hyper-desirable life. How can you not feel bad? Humans compare themselves to other people innately, and so occupying a universe, whether online or offline, that exposes you to the one-percenters in physical appearance and life satisfaction—whether honest or not—has the potential to be very damaging. Now, if the avatars people use in the metaverse are obviously not real, that mitigates this effect."

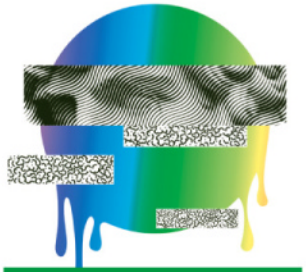
To Alter, the scourge of social media is that the photos that stream across our screens seem real, but aren't. "The problem is believing people are genuinely interesting and attractive," he writes, "but if you're interacting with them in a setting that makes clear they don't actually look the way they present themselves, or where they're not consistently interesting, you may not experience the same deficit as you do on more subtly manicured platforms."

One platform that fits Alter's schema is Bitmoji—the customized cartoon platform that Snap Inc. acquired in 2016. Per a representative, 85 percent of Gen Z—a generation born into the internet age— has made one. Bitmoji characters are exaggerated and cute. Not airbrushed. No one would call a Bitmoji "manicured." It doesn't pretend to be real. David Rosenberg—who serves as Bitmoji's director of strategy for Snap—explains the caricatures' appeal to Gen Z like so: "It's not an escapist or aspirational version of them." It's sillier. And more fun. It feels truer, faster and easier to send to a friend than a "perfect" selfie.

Still, to produce a virtual stand-in—even one with a sense of humor—requires an act of reinvention. It's a Cinderella moment for the internet. That thrill is part of what keeps Svoboda, who materializes via Zoom from her gamer chair with a cascade of pink string lights behind her, so invested in Roblox. It's like a department store, Sephora counter, and amusement park rolled into one. But with no "unflattering" trends or nauseating rides. There are no ill-fitting bathing suits in the metaverse. Svoboda gushes over the growing number of user-generated faces in Roblox. "I'm like, 'Oh gosh, I wish I could rock that kind of makeup look in real life.' I do not have a face fit for that," she says. "So of course, I would go into Roblox and be like, 'Yes, that's going to be something that I'm going to grab and put on.'"

Brands have gotten hip to the appeal. In the Givenchy Beauty House experience on Roblox, users can virtually style and apply dozens of makeup looks on their avatars

> "Society is moving toward increasingly digital and virtual lives and that has an impact on how we see ourselves and how we see others."



METAVERSE TERMS TO KNOW

Internet speak to help you navigate the digital world.

By Deena Campbell

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)
The ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings.

AVATAR
An icon or figure representing a particular person in a video game, internet forum, or social media.

BITMOJI
Brand name for a digital cartoon image that is intended to look like and represent you, used in electronic communication.

METAVERSE
A virtual-reality space in which users can interact with a computer-generated environment and other users.

VIRTUAL REALITY (VR)
The use of computer modeling and simulation that enables a person to interact with an artificial three-dimensional (3D) visual or other sensory environment.

WEB3
A new stack of technologies for the development of decentralized web applications that enable users to control their own identity and data.

in a matter of minutes. Laura Mercier runs a similar service on its site. At the start of 2023, BUXOM Cosmetics launched the "BUXOM Plumpverse." It boasts "gamified experiences" and an AR-augmented filter that lets users sample its Plump Shot Sheer Tint serum. I can see how the tools would be useful, but I also know the secret: that makeup—applied over pores and real skin—never looks as "good" as Photoshop or filters.

"It's more vivid," Svoboda says, comparing Roblox to traditional social media. Later, she adds: "When it comes to real life, if I snap a picture, I have to focus on, 'How am I going to pose? Is this going to be a horrible Snap?' Whereas when I go to Roblox, I can go wild with it and I can post that picture on social media and instead of it having to be me, I'm still going to get praised." The likes roll in. She doesn't even need to show her face.

In the name of journalism, I decide to make an Instagram avatar. It takes me about 20 minutes. I spend 12 of them testing out various mouth-and-nose combinations. The completed avatar looks like a cross between me, a short, pale-skinned brunette, and Lord Farquaad from the animated film *Shrek*.

"It's a weird experience to break down your look into individual parts," says Emma Gray, a writer and podcaster, who made an Instagram avatar around the same time I did. "It's not the natural way we consume our own faces or other people's faces." Gray swiped between Instagram's customization tool and photos of herself. She couldn't remember quite what her own features looked like. "You view the totality of it. You're not like, 'That chin is so oblong.'"

She's not sure whether she'll use her creation, but the process of Frankensteining her made her glad she grew up pre-metaverse. The limited number of available bodies on Instagram—just 10, at present—depressed her. She ended up with a "string bean little thing" of a shape. It's not that adults are liberated from the social forces that have adolescents in a vice grip, but at least she had a chance to become who she is without screens—without the constant self-reflection. If she were still a teenager, she wonders whether that disorientation and disconnection would feel amplified. Whose appearance would matter more to her—her real self or her digital one?

In late 2022, a photo and video editing app called Lensa AI exploded on social media. Lensa uses machine-learning tools (and, per some persistent accusations, stolen artwork) to generate portraits based on selfies. It called them "magic avatars" and charged a few dollars for them. A shocking number of people I know paid. Lensa transformed them into astronauts and sad e-girls and princesses. "I wish I looked like this!" a friend said, showing me the cut-glass cheekbones that Lensa had given her. In the portrait, she had green skin. But her cheekbones did look great.

Writer Jessica DeFino, who explores the ugly side of the beauty industry in her newsletter *The Unpublishable*, expects that more of us will seek to replicate bits of our avatar selves. Or we'll be tempted to. "I think it is concerning that society is moving toward increasingly digital and virtual lives and that has an impact on how we see ourselves and how we see others," she says.

> "Each avatar provides another face to tend to, with bodies to assess and scrutinize. There is no escaping that."

There have been efforts to make the process of creating avatars more inclusive. In 2018, Bitmoji expanded its skin-tone options from 25 to 40. In 2020, it added a mullet to its hair menu. In 2022, Bitmoji Deluxe introduced hundreds of new options such that no two Bitmoji are alike. A friend with deep-brown skin told me she wouldn't have made a Memoji—the iOS version of Bitmoji—had she not been able to shade-match her complexion. She wanted to feel like herself even in two dimensions. And I would know her avatar even in the remotest reaches of the metaverse; I see it and it makes me smile. It feels like her.

DeFino notes that even the most assiduous stab at representation still places the focus—and our collective gaze—on bodies. "I call it the aesthetic realm," she says. "So much of our lives right now are lived in the aesthetic realm. We're concerned with how we look, how things appear to others. We are so focused on aesthetics at the expense of the rest of our being."

Avatars are an extension of that. Each provides another face to tend to, with bodies to assess and scrutinize. There is no escaping that.

In 2020, CNN joined a chorus of publications reporting on the number of dermatological treatments and surgical interventions designed to mimic the effects of social-media filters. Young women are consulting their doctors in the hopes of achieving "Instagram face"—the homogeneous small-nose-enormous-cheekbones look that AR filters materialize on screens.

Avatars have their own risks. Bitmojis are sweet cartoons; Roblox characters can be fairies, reptiles, or have blue skin. None of them have pores. Filters on social media move with a person's face behind them; avatars are independent. When someone over-identifies with one, it's their real life that can start to feel fake.

Dendy Engelman, M.D., a New York board-certified dermatologist, tells me that patients bring manipulated photos of themselves into appointments several times a week. Mostly from people who use Facetune and want lip fillers. Engelman isn't opposed; it's her business.

VIRTUAL REALITY RULES TO FOLLOW

Alex Box, M.D., identity designer and beauty futurist, on what you need to adhere to when creating your identity in the metaverse.

By Deena Campbell

1 CREATING A CELEBRITY DOPPELGANGER?

Think again. "It's okay to create an avatar of a celebrity if that avatar is licensed and authenticated by the celebrity and is hosted on an ethical and reputable platform," says Box. "Equally, creating any likeness of an existing person requires their consent."

2 KEEP IN MIND YOUR INTENTION

Ask yourself why your avatar is being made to look like someone else. "[The same rules apply for] fake accounts and identity theft," says Box. "If the intention is harm, deception, and exploitation, then it's problematic."

3 FOLLOW REAL WORLD RULES

The same ethics and code of conduct that exist in the real world should be applied to the metaverse. "Behind every created avatar there is a real person with a moral compass," says Box. "Ethically what we have learned to be as humans and have also failed to do in the real world applies even more so for an emerging world."

> "It's pointless to draw elaborate distinctions between digital worlds and ours. Young people don't see the divide."

But she has had to counsel patients who "present altered renderings of themselves" so dramatic that she can't in good conscience provide her services. "When I deem it undesirable or unattractive, I will explain that this is not an aesthetic that should be achieved," she writes in an email. "Patients can be upset, but that's ultimately good medicine."

It can be weird and euphoric and complicated and damaging, but what Claire Pescott, Ph.D., knows for sure is that the metaverse is not disappearing. Pescott studies what she calls the digital social world and its impact on tweens in particular. She talks to parents whose greatest fear is that their child be groomed or abused in an online space, but who do not think at all about how to help their kids navigate far more prevalent issues—filters, avatars, self-expression, and online personas. Her aim is not to be a cheerleader for the metaverse, but to be realistic about it. It's pointless to continue to draw elaborate distinctions between digital worlds and ours. Young people don't see the divide.

"What I did find was that culture online was an extension of culture in real life," she says. What Pescott means is that problems that have plagued avatar tech, from filters to digital doubles that look like Bratz dolls, are not so different from the problems in our culture in general. We won't be able to fix what ails the metaverse until we fix the biases and toxic standards we've normalized here. She hears girls' anxieties in her studies. Not feeling beautiful, wanting to hide behind a filter. She didn't have Snapchat as a kid, but she knows the impulse. Girls have learned it in school and from peers for generations, not from some new tech overlord.

"It's not all negative," Pescott adds. The metaverse can be a true and actual revelation for people who live in places that don't offer them the freedom to be themselves. "Young children and teenagers who are experimenting with their identities can be different people, wear different props, test out different personalities, and that can be a real positive." For LGBTQ+ kids in particular, it can be a haven.

That service—the metaverse as a genuine town square, where people from different countries and cultures can feel welcome and explore—is something the sector will have to work to provide. It will require overcoming the issues that people like Mota have experienced. But it is—per Rosenberg—what users expect from companies like Bitmoji. He explains that Bitmoji receives constant feedback from consumers. Some user requests are a little too particular to cater to, like people who want their avatars to have a tattoo that looks just like theirs. But others have inched it closer to what Rosenberg identifies as its ultimate aim: to be "the world's avatar." To be able to accommodate features as diverse and unique as exist on this planet. It has created one billion avatars to date.

Giselle Mota abandoned the metaverse that failed to represent her. She has since founded NFTY Collective, which makes avatars for people with seen and unseen disabilities that can be customized with prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs, and more. The metaverse has improved when it comes to racial representation, but it still falls short of true inclusion. Mota wants to fix that. Each avatar is based on a real person, a partnership that Mota emphasizes. She knows the dehumanizing effect of mix-and-match features. She likes to remind people that real bodies are behind her personalities.

Mota worries about how different skin tones and bodies can be weaponized in the metaverse. There's no real recourse for policing cultural appropriation. It operates as it does elsewhere: You have to call it out.

Her work now takes aim at the conventional aesthetic standards that occur both in our real world and in the worlds that people are building. What she wants for the metaverse is liberation. She hopes for a virtual universe that lets people be their truest selves—whether that means making it possible for them to build the most "accurate" avatar or one that just captures something about their mood, their dreams. She wants to create avatars in wheelchairs and avatars that let amputees run on two legs: "To us, it's about the choice."

Mota will not cede this new world to the same people who have seized power in ours. AI has its own biases—ones that computer scientists and engineers and entrepreneurs feed it with data and algorithms. The output replicates existent discrimination. "We need more people of color designing these technologies, creating for their communities and representing," she says. "If I would've been like, 'I'm not going to touch this topic,' then no one would hear [from me]."

Her silence wouldn't mean no metaverse. It would just mean the metaverse would be built without the input of people like her.

The work is too close to her to abandon. The metaverse is more than what she does. It's who she is. **mc**

PHOTOS: GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK. ARTWORK: DAVID GRAHAM

Christina Stembel is the founder of Farmgirl Flowers.

WHEN SELF-FUNDING AFFECTS YOUR SELF-WORTH

Today's venture capital process continues to fail female founders, forcing many to risk their own savings to start a business. But that can come at a cost to their personal well-being.

BY TANYA BENEDICTO-KLICH

Growing up in rural Indiana, Christina Stembel never pictured herself as an entrepreneur. But in 2008, after moving to the Bay Area, she had a business idea. Stembel was working as the director of alumni events at Stanford Law, where a big part of her job was ordering décor. "I saw how much we were spending on flowers and went down the rabbit hole from there," she says. She learned that the e-commerce flower industry was shrinking in popularity among younger consumers. And that when people did order online, they were often unhappy because their arrangements looked *nothing* like the photos.

Stembel was inspired to build a better direct-to-consumer floral shop. It would be sustainable, with flowers sourced from a network of ethical farms. The bouquets would come wrapped in upcycled burlap to help combat the industry's plastic waste issue. She even had a name for her venture: Farmgirl Flowers.

To Stembel, it seemed like a much-needed concept in an industry that was "ready for a little disruption," but investors rejected her business proposal over a hundred times. That's when she decided to fund her idea with her own money. "I used the entirety of my life savings," she says. A total of $49,000. "I gave myself two years to make it work."

But the high-wire act of using personal funds to start a company can create a blurred scenario, where it becomes difficult to untangle one's individual identity from that of their startup; how good their business is doing determines how good they feel about themselves. "Self-worth, especially as an entrepreneur, can be closely tied to the business you are building," says Nina Vasan, M.D., chief medical officer at Real, a mental health platform. "It's not uncommon for one's feeling of self-worth to ebb and flow along with the success of the business."

And yet, the choice of whether to sink personal money into a venture is a decision a lot of women face when starting a company. While fundraising is one of the biggest obstacles for every new business owner, for women entrepreneurs, it's especially hard. Last year, female-founded companies raised just two percent of venture capital, according to Pitchbook, a company providing private market data. The lowest since 2016.

When new businesses opt out of, or cannot access, traditional funding—such as angel or venture investors, crowdfunding, or bank loans—they often resort to bootstrapping. That's when founders use personal capital to launch a venture. Often by dipping into (or depleting) their life savings, cashing out retirement accounts, or using personal credit cards. According to a Kauffman Foundation survey of nearly 350 female tech founders and startup leaders, 80 percent reported using personal savings as their primary source of funding to start a business.

Which means that unlike venture-backed companies that can burn through thousands, if not millions, in funding, founders who are relying on their own money to launch their operation often feel their personal financial decisions are directly tied to the financial decisions of their companies.

This was the case for Stembel. "I found myself doing crazy things," she says. "I switched from coffee to Lipton tea because the unit economics stretched that pot a little further–$.06 a cup!" She ate ramen noodles and peanut butter sandwiches. Dining out with friends was out of the question. "I made my personal expenses as small and as least impactful to my bottom line as possible because it meant I could make Farmgirl bigger and bigger," she adds. To keep costs low, she even ran her business out of the same 650-square-foot apartment where she lived (until her landlord got word and gave her a couple weeks to move the company, or herself, out of the apartment—she moved).

"The sacrifice of friends, of sleep, of time to do anything other than live and breathe business stuff is real," says Stembel. "And that reality bites extra hard when you're bootstrapping because there is zero safety net. As in, I could not only be broke, but could go bankrupt tomorrow if the tides turn." Farmgirl Flowers *was* Stembel and vice versa. They didn't feel like separate things.

The interconnectedness of it all can be difficult to parse, and sometimes even lead to mental health issues. "Emotionally and financially the responsibility is all on you, so it can cause a great deal of worry and concern," says Cate Luzio, founder and CEO of Luminary, a New York City-based workspace for women that also serves as a global education and networking platform. (Luzio bootstrapped Luminary.) "Anxiety is a major issue, especially if you end up needing to access capital, or if you've

Ashley Tyrner went from being a single mom living on food stamps to the founder and CEO of FarmboxRx.

"Several investors told me that my lack of education was alarming to them."

Denise Woodard and her daughter, who inspired her business, Partake Foods.

depleted your savings, racked up debt, or gone into retirement [reserves] to fund the business."

Psychotherapist Paul Hokemeyer, Ph.D., whose research focuses on high-performing entrepreneurs, says self-funding has a significant impact on women entrepreneurs' mental health. "This is because women experience a direct connection between the attainment of their financial goals and their personal self-worth," he says.

Separating your identity from your business becomes even more of a challenge, when to sell investors on your business idea is to essentially sell yourself. In 2014, when Ashley Tyrner was starting her company—FarmboxRx, a subscription service for fresh produce—investors couldn't look past her identity as a Latina, single mom, and she was often on the receiving end of degrading and disrespectful comments.

"Several investors told me that my lack of education was alarming to them," says Tyrner. "I've had men go as far as asking to see my detailed financials before taking a meeting with me because 'women aren't known for being good with money.'" More recently she's had high-profile investors tell her that she needed to bring in a "more seasoned leader" to replace her because she wasn't qualified. "I truly felt defeated," she says.

Ultimately, to get her company off the ground, Tyrner had to downsize her apartment and use $70,000 of her own savings. "Over nine years, I had no option but to self-fund my business growth through a cycle of venture capital rejection as I watched my non-minority male peers close seven and eight-figure investments on pre-revenue ideas," she says.

> "Women experience a direct connection between the attainment of their financial goals and their personal self-worth."

There can be an upside, though. In 2016, when Denise Woodard's daughter was a year old, she found out she had several food allergies. Through research, Woodard learned that 32 million Americans are living with similar sensitivities and that there was a market for allergen-free snacks. To get her business, Partake Foods, off the ground, Woodard says she "maxed out our credit cards, emptied my 401(k), and even sold my engagement ring." All in: She invested $140,000 of her own money before eventually fundraising.

"My personal identity is tied to the overarching mission of Partake, so I never questioned making the financial decisions I did to be able to grow the business," she says. "I felt confident in what I was doing and managed to keep a strong sense of self and positive mental outlook."

Not to mention, when a company takes off, it can be incredibly empowering: Just like all of the stress felt personal, the success does, too. Stembel has still not taken a penny from outside investors. And today, Farmgirl Flowers has grown into an international team. At the end of 2020, the company made over $60 million in revenue, doubling the year before.

Meanwhile Tyrner has turned her company into a multi-million dollar business. "Part of what drives me forward is the pride I feel when I prove investors wrong," she says. That feeling of accomplishment, well, that's part of her identity, too. mc

PHOTOS: ANNA-ALEXIA BASILE, CHRISTINE DESAVINO PHOTOGRAPHY

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Here's to the women making moves that matter

Our partnership with the Institute for Women's Entrepreneurship at Cornell University is just one of the many ways we're helping women overcome challenges to growing their small businesses.

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TRIED AND TRUE TIPS FOR WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS FROM A TRUSTED SMALL BUSINESS BANKER

Amidst the economic uncertainty of 2023, planning for the future is more important and challenging than ever. According to a recent Bank of America survey, 78% of small business owners expect a potential recession would impact their business, potentially forcing them to raise prices, slow hiring plans and reduce spending.

Enter Jenny Son, a small business banker at Bank of America who has helped business owners plan ahead and invest in their success for the past five years. Son serves as a sounding board and advisor to business owners navigating day-to-day business challenges and choppy economic waters. For Son, relationship building and puzzle solving is exactly what makes her job so enjoyable. Though every business challenge is unique, years of experience have taught Son there are similarities in the issues that tend to pop up for business owners—especially women entrepreneurs.

Ahead of Women's History Month, Son shares some of the top tips that have helped her clients over the years.

1

CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN

Son encourages all entrepreneurs to focus on the elements of business ownership within their control, particularly in a tough economic climate. There will always be headwinds that business owners need to weather rather than fix, but sometimes there are simple solutions to the challenges impacting their operations.

For example, Son encourages clients to embrace digital tools such as mobile check deposits and balance verification, eliminating the need to run to the bank every time they need to deposit a check or check their account balance. Resources like this can save business owners significant time each year that they can devote to their family and friends.

2

UNDERSTAND YOUR OPTIONS

Son says sometimes her clients don't know they can fix or enhance their processes simply by having just a bit more working capital. So, in any client meeting, she always presents all the solutions available, which allows her clients to decide on the best option for their business. "Helping my clients access capital to run or expand their business in a responsible way really gives me pride in what I do," Son says. As securing capital is critical for most clients, this typically involves highlighting the traditional and non-traditional funding options available, including:

- **Traditional business loans.** Son says she often recommends Small Business Administration (SBA) loans, which are guaranteed by the SBA and typically have qualification criteria attainable for new business owners.

- **CDFIs.** Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) are lenders focused on serving business owners in low-income communities. If a business owner is struggling to obtain funding, CDFIs may offer resources and products to meet their needs.

- **Grants.** These are guaranteed funds that aren't paid back. Plus, there is often a waterfall effect—a business owner whose been awarded one is often likely to secure another. You can find hundreds of grant applications at Grants.gov.

- **Bank of America's Access to Capital Directory.** For any business owner still struggling to identify the best funding for their business, the Access to Capital Directory is a great resource, as it's designed to help women business owners find the best-fit choice, including equity, debt and grant capital.

3

STAY NIMBLE

Son says the most successful business owners she works with embrace a "learning attitude." In a rapidly changing world and economy, business owners must train themselves to quickly adapt to new ways of thinking, planning and doing.

Fortunately, there are resources available to help business owners learn and become more flexible—like SCORE, Bank of America's Small Business Resources site, or more formal learning platforms from organizations such as LinkedIn or the SBA.

4

FIND YOUR CHAMPIONS

Building trust in any relationship, especially a business relationship, takes time. Son says this is often one of the biggest challenges at the start of a new client relationship, as small business owners are extremely busy people.

"This isn't something you can rush through," says Son. "When clients know that I truly understand them, that creates trust and a bond that helps them understand I'm in it to help them."

Once that trust is established, having someone that understands the nature of the business and genuinely believes in the venture is invaluable.

As with any successful partnership, the benefits of Son's client relationships flow both ways. "Seeing these amazing entrepreneurs at work first-hand gives me the daily motivation to help them achieve their goals and overcome hurdles," says Son.

While achieving short- and long-term business goals amidst a challenging economy may feel daunting to small business owners, understanding your options, making a plan and finding a trusted advisor make a world of a difference.

■ To learn more about how you can reach your small business goals, consider contacting a small business banker at Bank of America.

BANK OF AMERICA

> “Helping my clients access capital to run or expand their business in a responsible way really gives me pride in what I do”

Changing the Conversation

As the host of the podcast "She Pivots," ***Emily Tisch Sussman*** *has interviewed myriad successful women, including Vice President Kamala Harris. This is what she's learned about identity, career, and redefining who you are.*

Remember when we all believed that women could have it all? I do. I was at the height of my political career, working as an executive at one of the largest think tanks in Washington, D.C., taking on huge fights like repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell (the military's ban on gay service members) and going head-to-head with the NRA.

Other things were hitting their peak then, too. Like the merry-go-round of aspirational content on social media, spinning out picture-perfect photos of women posing with their families in color-coordinated outfits. Women showing off their fairytale houses. Women brunching with friends. Women rocketing into work in stilettos. Women—having it all. I bought into it.

Until 2016, when I had my first child. Within the next few years, I had two more. That's when I left my decade-long career in politics. It was a crushing blow of defeat. And without my career as an anchor, I slowly began to lose my grip on my personal identity. I no longer knew how to answer the simple question of who I was.

Now, women are pushing back against the tropes of having it all and leaning in. We are in the midst of a massive societal shift where women are continuing to reshape and re-examine the narrative around work. We're over the Girl Boss and we're leaving behind the systems that don't serve us. Perhaps that's why last year over 40 percent of Americans planned to make a career change.

Things changed for me, too. Among them: I launched my podcast "She Pivots" as a way to share stories of women who are finding new career paths that are a better fit for their lives. With the new season premiering, these are a few things I heard from some incredible women.

VICE PRESIDENT KAMALA HARRIS ON NOT LETTING OTHERS DEFINE YOU

On paper, there is no question that Vice President Harris is highly accomplished. From serving as the district attorney of San Francisco, to attorney general of California, to senator, to presidential candidate, to now the first Black, female, Asian American vice president in history, her story seems to seamlessly transition from one success to the next.

But the real success is taking on the challenge of a pivot and occupying spaces so many people told her she was not welcome. For every new office she assumed, Vice President Harris said yes in the face of so many who questioned her very identity.

"When I was elected DA of San Francisco, I was the first Black

PHOTOS: ALAMY, DIRTY SUGAR, GETTY

Clockwise from left: Kamala Harris, Pinky Cole, and Carla Stickler, who have all successfully reinvented their professional selves.

> “Sometimes we go through difficulties in our personal and professional lives so that we can see a different light.”

woman to ever have been elected as DA anywhere in the state of California,” she tells me during our interview. “And so, you can imagine when I decided to run, and I took on an incumbent, the number of people that said to me, ‘Oh, they’re not ready for you.’ ‘It’s not your time.’ ‘It’s going to be hard work.’ And I didn’t listen.” Lucky for us!

RESTAURATEUR PINKY COLE ON HOW SETBACKS CAN RESET US

I ask every guest to tell me about something they saw as a low point in their life that they now view as a positive. I think it gets to the heart of why so many women change paths. This couldn’t be more true for Cole. After losing her first eatery to a grease fire in 2016, her life was turned upside down. “To lose the thing that you live and breathe every single day and then you go broke at the same time—it was very difficult,” says Cole. “I felt like I failed.” But with time, she realized that it was that difficult moment that eventually put her on the right path. “I needed that to happen, so that I could shift and adjust and do something new.”

Her ability to reframe led her to create her restaurant franchise Slutty Vegan in 2018, which is now a multi-million-dollar company with several locations. As she says now, “Sometimes we go through difficulties in our personal and professional lives so that we can see a different light.”

BROADWAY STAR CARLA STICKLER ON MOVING ON FROM WHAT YOU LOVE

Stickler made headlines for leaving behind her coveted spot in the Broadway show *Wicked* to take a corporate job as a software engineer. “People have trouble wrapping their brain around that you would ever possibly want to give something up that they see as something that everyone wants,” says Stickler. “I had a lot of people that were like, ‘You’re living my dream.’ But the dream is really exhausting and I was burnt out.”

Her story is exactly what you wouldn’t expect from the tales of success we hear daily. Instead of following that creative passion, she left it behind for something that made sense personally.

Stickler’s interview left me with an important lesson: You can experience burnout—even from something you love. “I can show other people…that there is a world where you can do multiple things,” says Stickler. “Where the thing that your college self decided you wanted to do for the rest of your life doesn’t have to be the thing you do for the rest of your life. And if there is a way to find value in yourself alongside your journey as an artist, so you’re not constantly seeking it from somebody else, like why not find that, right?” **mc**

Listen to “She Pivots” wherever you get your podcasts.

Millions of Americans Have My “Invisible Disability.” You’ve Probably Never Heard of It.

Developmental coordination disorder (DCD) can make daily life a struggle. So why isn’t it better known?

BY JENNY HOLLANDER

When I was 9, my teacher took my parents aside and suggested that they take me to see a specialist. She couldn't put her finger on it, but there was something "off" about me. At the time, we couldn't have known that London, our hometown, was one of the few places in the world that might recognize symptoms like mine (clumsiness, disorganization) in the '90s. I submitted to a battery of tests—could I copy the shape of a kite onto a fresh piece of paper? Throw a ball against the wall and catch it?—and, days later, we had an answer: I have a classic case of dyspraxia, known in the U.S. as developmental coordination disorder, or DCD.

Some things, the specialist told us, would always be harder for me: walking, talking, tying my shoelaces. Finagling my way from point A to point B, both in terms of physical terrain and in my own head. I'd probably struggle with my speech, my handwriting, physical or mental sequences—anything that involved motor skills, a term that refers to the brain-body mechanism that allows you to wave, run, chew, or speak without even thinking about it.

The phrase "motor disability" went right over my 9-year-old head, so the specialist explained: Not all the messages from your brain are seamlessly reaching your body. Every single thing your brain has to plan and carry out, from lifting a mug or swallowing a peanut to copying a dance step or following a map, will always be a little harder, will require a little more focus, will be more likely to go wrong.

I didn't really understand. Hell, I'm still not sure I understand. But I got lucky. Living near the world's first-ever Dyspraxia Foundation, parented by people who refused to consider that DCD might hold me back, enrolled in occupational therapy, and later regular counseling, and surrounded by teachers who were often familiar with the condition—I mean, I was the luckiest accident-prone kid that ever lived.

Then, in 2012, I moved to the U.S. for graduate school, and for the first time learned what it feels like to live among people who have never heard of DCD. Who wonder, sometimes out loud, if it's all just in your head.

Roughly 6 percent of people worldwide have DCD. That makes it more common than autism spectrum disorder, which is thought to affect 1 percent of the population, and close to being as common as dyslexia, which affects about one in 10 people. You probably have a working knowledge of both. DCD, however, is often overlooked in the world of neurodevelopmental disorders, having only formally received classification in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 2013.

I've spent much of my life trying to communicate to people what I know to be true about my brain—that, yes, I am clumsy as hell, but it's more than that. Well-meaning friends and family ask me to elaborate, and I can't. I am an editor, a writer, a person whose career and mental health are built on undoing the threads in my head and putting words to them; I can process and articulate the technical aspects of my disorder as much as anybody with a disorder that gets in the way of processing and speaking can—but in 20 years, I have never, not once, gotten close to conveying what it *feels* like.

It is not just about the effort it takes to do the simplest things. It's about the way the world has to slow down for me to do them. If I get up from a chair, I have to consider my limb placement with the focus of a tightrope walker, or else I trip—on my other foot, on the leg of the chair, on nothing at all. If I don't chew my food carefully and in silence, I swallow the wrong morsel at the wrong time and choke on it; if I try to speak while I'm eating, I get overwhelmed and begin to quietly breathe faster, faster, trying to push myself to do this perfectly normal thing that is *going out for dinner*, until the edges of my vision are soft. This would all be fine if everybody else's worlds were constantly slowing down too, but they aren't. The people around you operate so easily, so fluidly, without pause, that you have to assume you're doing it wrong. There's a word for what they are—neurotypical—but it feels personal: they're doing it right, and you're all wrong. That's the rub with DCD: you've never known things any other way.

To live with DCD is to feel perpetually out of sync, to quote the title of the popular book by Carol Stock Kranowitz, an expert in motor and sensory issues—out of sync with the sounds you hear, the movements you intend to make, the space around your body, the concepts people describe, the ways you try to say, do, act, and process what surrounds you. Most of all, you are out of sync with the effortless way the people around you seem to exist.

If that sounds isolating, it is. It's made more so by the fact that DCD rarely presents the same way in different people. Take my dad and my two brothers, for example, who also have DCD. (It's hypothesized to have a strong genetic component.) My father and I, we're famously clumsy, all elbows and flailing limbs, but he loves to eat (which I find overwhelming) and he was never able to ride a bike (which I can do). My brothers glide along beside us, taking easily to soccer, basketball, rowing, you name it—but one can't write by hand to save his life, and the other has a hard time with his speech, the words flooding out all at once and spilling over one another.

"There are so many pieces to DCD," explains Keith A. Coffman, M.D., the director of the Movement Disorders Program at the Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City. "Breaking it down into individual symptoms, or a small group of symptoms, is challenging."

Nobody knows what causes DCD, and there is no "cure." Before it was labeled a neurodevelopmental disorder, it had been posited to be a psychiatric disorder, a sensory disorder, a social disorder,

19 million
people in the United States have DCD, according to estimates.

a variation of cerebral palsy, and even "minimal brain damage." DCD "likely has a baffling quality to most people," says Linda Copeland, M.D., a developmental-behavioral pediatrician and assistant clinical professor at the University of California San Francisco-Fresno. "Teachers see bright, creative children who are not working to their potential. It becomes too easy to blame the child for being unmotivated or for misbehaving."

As many as half of people with DCD also have ADHD, and the same proportion of ADHD patients meets the criteria for DCD, so it is sometimes diagnosed as ADHD alone. Many others have it along with autism spectrum disorder or dyslexia. (More often than not, DCD isn't the only disorder a person has.) Different countries and organizations refer to DCD using different terms, and even experts use a variety of words to describe it; support groups and some Commonwealth countries, like Australia, tend to use "dyspraxia," while North America and the research community lean toward "DCD."

Unfortunately, DCD isn't well understood in any country. But in a place like the U.S.—hardly considered reticent when it comes to brain diagnoses—the lack of acknowledgment of DCD feels astonishing. Put another way: if modest estimations are correct, more than 19 million people in America have DCD. Without a diagnosis, they're left, at best, dimly aware that they're palpably and inexplicably less capable than the people around them. At worst, they feel out of sync with every part of their daily life. Research has shown that children with DCD are far more likely to suffer from anxiety and depression—and those are the kids "lucky" enough to get a diagnosis.

In a piece for *The Mighty*, librarian Kate Reynolds writes, "Life before I knew I had dyspraxia was full of unknown terrors and humiliations." But it was more than that, she tells me: "I always knew something was wrong, and I didn't know what. I felt a great deal of shame. I thought maybe things were this hard to everyone and I was just a failure who never bothered to try hard enough."

Like me, Warren Fried, now 41, was a clumsy kid who couldn't zip up a jacket or draw within the lines. Unlike me, Fried grew up in the northeastern U.S., where the kids and teachers around him thought he was "slow" or "lazy" or both. He couldn't recall simple instructions, connect with other students, or even process some of the words his teachers used. "My childhood in general felt like a hopeless failure," he says.

It wasn't until Fried studied abroad in West Sussex, a leafy county in the south of England, that he received a referral, an evaluation, and, finally, a diagnosis from his college's student services. He was 19. "In the U.S. education system, I was an enigma," he says. Of getting a diagnosis at all—"I was very fortunate."

It was then that Fried came across the Dyspraxia Foundation, founded in the late '80s by Marilyn Owen and Stella White, who had met at a "clumsy children" physiotherapy group and were astonished by the lack of support available for their kids. These days, the foundation publishes a research journal, operates more than a dozen local chapters, oversees fundraising events and conferences, and hosts an annual Dyspraxia Awareness Week. Inspired by the success the U.K. foundation has had, Fried returned to the U.S. and, in 2006, founded Dyspraxia USA.

Seventeen years later, Fried's organization remains the only dyspraxia/DCD-specific nonprofit in

1901

The year the first investigation into differing levels of motor abilities was published in *The American Journal of Psychology.*

America. He's happily married and a stay-at-home dad of young twins, but his foundation only sputters along. Relying on donations and membership fees, Dyspraxia USA has just a few thousand "likes" on social media, no partnerships with research organizations or significant programs, and no employees aside from Fried. It brought in less than $35,000 in 2019, while the U.K.-based foundation raised the equivalent of more than $215,000 in 2019. (A disclaimer: I was invited to join the board of Dyspraxia USA in August 2019 and ultimately resigned in November 2020.)

It's been a different story in the U.K. In part due to the U.K. Dyspraxia Foundation's work, references to DCD dot British popular culture. The BBC featured a main character with DCD in the new *Doctor Who.* Cara Delevingne told *Vogue* in 2015 that she's suffered from the disorder since she was a child. Daniel Radcliffe went public about his DCD diagnosis in 2008, explaining that he has trouble tying his shoelaces and was "crap at everything" at school. Emma Lewell-Buck, a member of Parliament since 2013, penned a HuffPost essay that proclaimed, "I am proud to be a person with dyspraxia." And GCHQ, the British NSA, actively recruits people with DCD and dyslexia, citing their "spiky skills"—skill sets that combine poor abilities, like coordination, with abilities that test in the 99th percentile. (The same tests that were used to diagnose me revealed that I read about two and a half times faster than is typical.)

In the U.S., there are no depictions of DCD on television or in film. (Believe me, I've looked.) Not one genuinely famous American has gone on the record about having the condition. There are some kids' books about it—*My Buddy Bryant: A Story of Friendship and Dyspraxia*, for example—but that's about it for DCD in American culture.

Working on this article, I tried to identify what went wrong for America. Although "clumsy child syndrome," the original label for DCD, was established in the '30s, the disorder didn't make it into the American diagnostic bible, the *DSM*, for 50 more years. Recommendations from the Council on Children with Disabilities for screening children with motor delays didn't go out until 2013. Dyspraxia USA was never successful in building a following, and Fried, who has no medical qualifications, remains a main resource for parents who Google their children's symptoms and land on "dyspraxia."

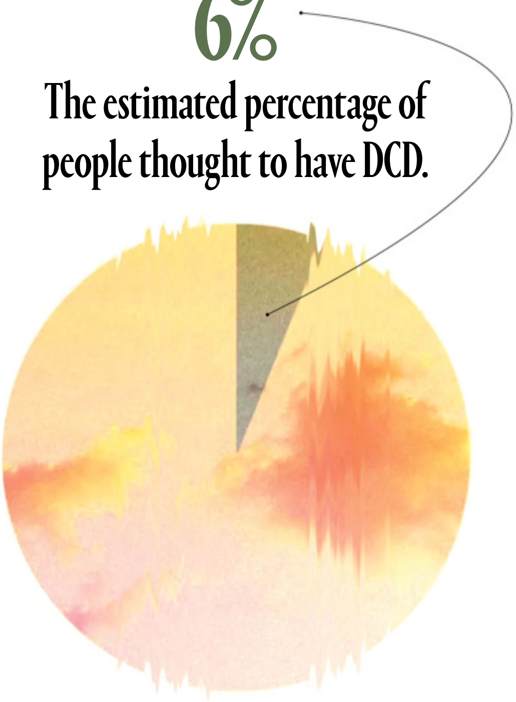
Most of the world's foremost DCD experts live, practice, and publish in different countries, but eventually I tracked down Priscila Tamplain, Ph.D., a young professor at the University of Texas at Arlington and the U.S. representative for the International Society for Research into DCD. Tamplain, who is originally from Brazil, is one of the only U.S. researchers who focuses on DCD rather than general motor difficulties (a large category that includes Huntington's, Tourette's, and Parkinson's). I asked her why that is. "There's a very clear reason for that," she says, "and it's funding. It's very hard to get funding for disorders that you can't streamline. You can't find two children with DCD that are the same."

I thought of my brothers and my dad. It barely feels like we share a disorder; we're more likely to bond over a pizza topping than a common difficulty. "And it very rarely comes in isolation," Tamplain adds. "It often comes with conditions like dyslexia, ADHD, autism, speech impairments, and so on, which are more prominent and more visible, in a way."

Confusing things further: not only does DCD usually go hand in hand with other disorders, its symptoms—challenges with movements big and small—often *are* features of those disorders. "Motor difficulties tend to be secondary for most of the

6%

The estimated percentage of people thought to have DCD.



population. They're well known to be associated with other conditions: intellectual deficits, autism, ADHD. But the core of DCD is motor difficulties," Tamplain explains. "DCD is a disorder of exclusion. To diagnose it, we need to exclude a whole lot of other things."

The odds are stacked against DCD, thanks to its wide swath of symptoms, its two different names, and its overlap with other, more "visible" disorders. But, Tamplain tells me, in the '90s you could have said the same of autism, which went by a mishmash of different names and had a low profile. Then came Autism Speaks, a nonprofit that launched in 2005—just one year before Fried founded Dyspraxia USA—with a $25 million cash injection from billionaire Bernie Marcus and a dynamic business model. Now a behemoth of an organization, albeit a controversial one—its past framing of autism as a "disease" and position on vaccines drew widespread condemnation—Autism Speaks has funded half a billion dollars' worth of research into the disorder, and it raised $94.5 million in 2018 alone.

I ask Tamplain what it's like to be so fiercely committed to a cause that, for now, keeps running into dead ends. "I'm here, you know, just hitting the waves because I just love these kids," she says. She's talking about the children of the Little Mavs Movement Academy, a DCD motor-skill intervention program run by the laboratory she directs. People come from as far as Mexico to have their kids join Little Mavs. But every child with DCD that she works with has different issues, Tamplain says, which makes them difficult to study. "I think it scares the scientific field."

1994

The year international experts agreed to use the term DCD.

Because there is no way to "fix" DCD, you can work to reduce the emotional, mental, and physical toll of the disorder, intervening at an early age, as Tamplain does, but you cannot make it go away. It's true that countries with universal health care have put more resources behind that work than the U.S. has; here, the for-profit medical system isn't designed for long-term, individualized therapies, but that's probably just one of the many reasons all of this happened. Well—didn't happen.

50%

The approximate number of people with ADHD who also have DCD, and vice versa.

I know that I'm one of the lucky ones. It doesn't make it easier. When you don't have language for how and why your brain is misfiring, you spend your life bending away from the situations that leave you feeling more alone and ashamed and overwhelmed. I almost never try new things, from new restaurants (what if they're noisy?) to new foods (hard to swallow?) or new hobbies (what if I can't?). My friends joke that I'm new-experience averse, but I just want to make it through the day without being overwhelmed. When the directions don't make sense and it's hard to swallow your water and harder to enunciate, when you're standing unsteadily and breathing rapidly and the seams on your clothes are scratching your skin—and it looks to everybody else like you're just walking down the street, but it feels like you're only just holding on to yourself? I don't have the words for that. *Oh, yes, don't mind me, I'm just drowning in my own brain*?

When you don't have the language to communicate what you're going through, for any kind of problem, that sense of confusion, of hopelessness, crystallizes into shame. Every time I watch somebody drive or dance or effortlessly glide across a room, I feel ashamed. It doesn't make sense, because it's not my fault, but I'm not thinking about that. I'm only thinking: *I can't do that. Look at them do it.*

When I have kids, they're probably going to have DCD. (I informed my boyfriend at, oh, month two that he'd be our family chauffeur. He has high hopes for the future of self-driving cars.) By then, I hope I'll have figured out how to describe what feels like crossed wires in parts of my brain and holes elsewhere. I hope it's better for them, but I don't know. I hope they get the support I did, and I hope that when they tell people what's going on with them, someone knows what that means. **mc**

For more information about DCD, visit Understood.org.

ARTWORK BY SUSANNA HAYWARD

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PRIX
D'EXCELLENCE
DE LA BEAUTÉ
2023

PRIX D'EXCELLENCE BEAUTY AWARDS 2023

Beauty contributes to all aspects of our health and wellness, and the care we dedicate to ourselves directly impacts how we feel and, in turn, who we are. This year, for the 37th edition of *Marie Claire*'s Beauty Excellence Awards, the jury tested dozens of new products, debated, and selected only the most innovative. After months of deliberating, we concluded with six international awards, 10 U.S. winners and one transatlantic honoree. Powdered skincare, body creams, and powerful serums: here are the best new launches.

BY AURÉLIE LAMBILLON AND DEENA CAMPBELL

International Winners

Exfoliating Enzyme Mask by Sisley Paris

This fine powder, mixed with a little water, becomes a creamy mask ($135) to apply to your face. In 60 seconds, its key ingredient, papain, evens out and brightens the complexion, making it easy to see why it's earned our **Formulation Award**. Indeed, it's "the new champion of the mask sector," says Cristina Torlaschi from *Marie Claire* Italy.

Abeille Royale Scalp & Hair Youth-Oil-In Serum by Guerlain

Beautiful hair requires a healthy scalp: that's the philosophy behind this ritualist serum ($140), which uses honey from Ouessant black bees to revitalize the scalp and increase the hair fiber's resistance level.

T.L.C. Glycolic Body Lotion by Drunk Elephant

A body treatment ($25) inspired by the most hard-working facial treatments. AHAs gently exfoliate and soften rough patches, while a cocktail of moisturizing agents (butters and plant oils) provides long-lasting relief to even the driest skin.

Rénergie H.C.F. Triple Serum by Lancôme

Lancôme brings together three active regenerating ingredients—complementary but previously incompatible—in a single serum ($140). Water-binding hyaluronic acid, vitamin C plus niacinamide, and antioxidant ferulic acid are kept separately in a three-chamber bottle. All together: a powerful technological innovation.

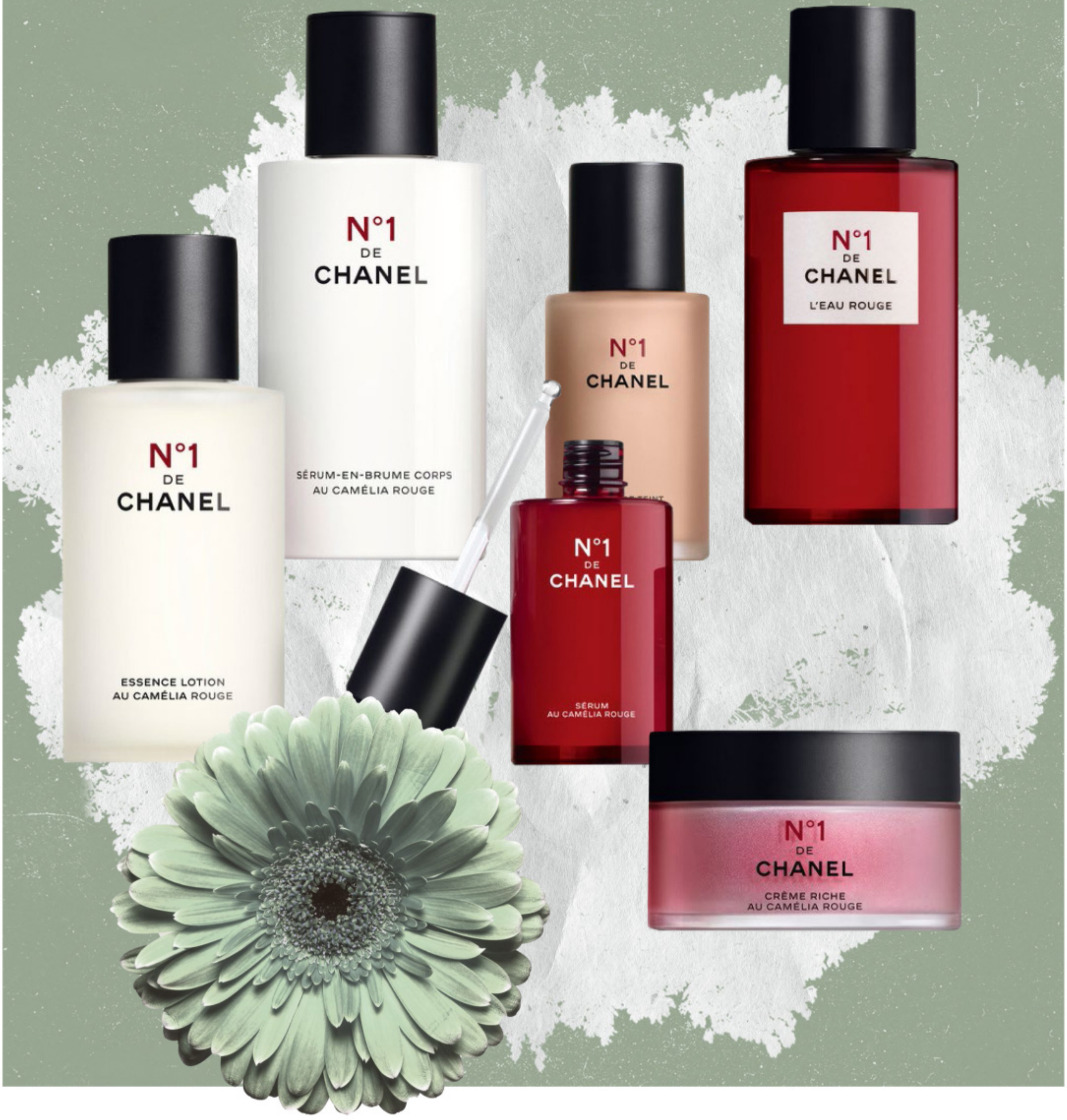
Bain Chroma Respect, Soin Acide Chroma Gloss, Sérum Chroma Thermique, Fondant Cica Chroma by Kérastase

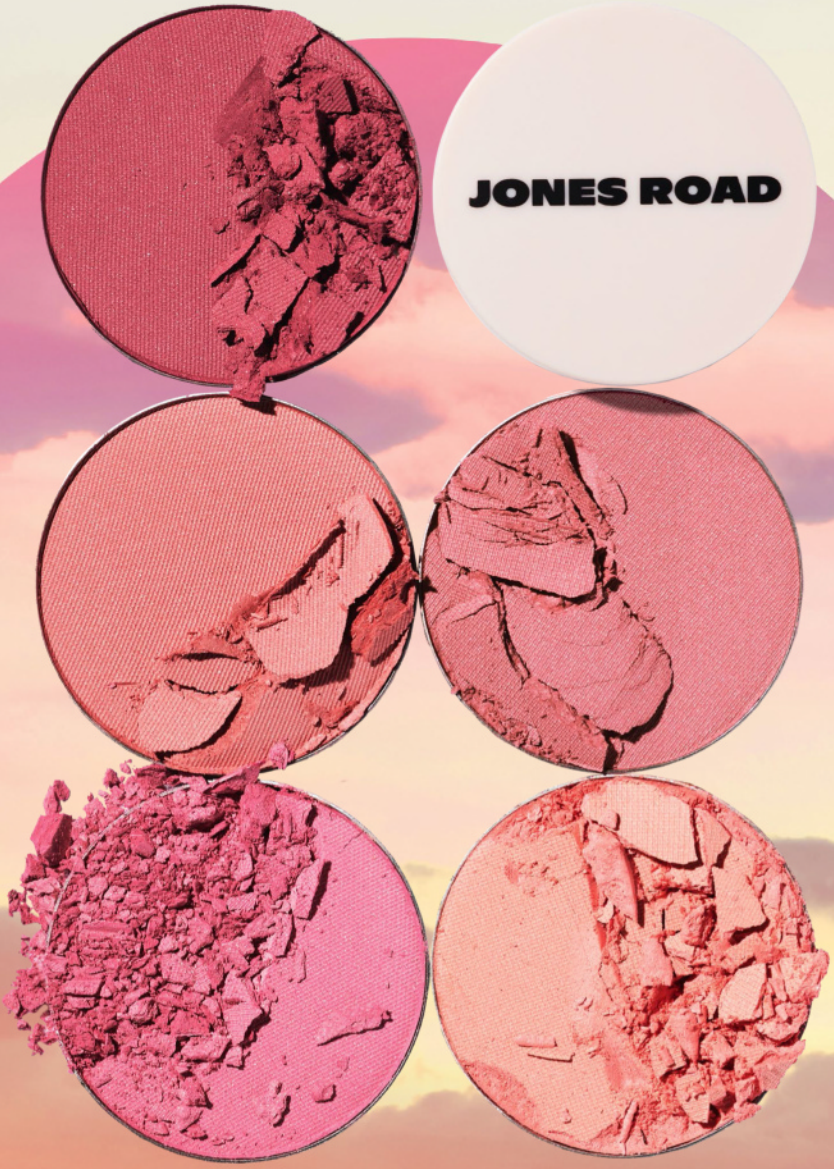
Kérastase's Chroma Absolu collection (from $36 to $53) is designed to protect dyed hair and fights three enemies (the environment, heat, and humidity) with specialized formulas (amino, tartaric, and lactic acids, plus soothing antioxidant Centella asiatica) that preserve and restore hair fibers.

SPECIAL JURY PRIZE

Nº1 de Chanel Revitalizing Essence Lotion, Nº1 de Chanel Revitalizing Body Serum-In-Mist, Nº1 de Chanel Revitalizing Foundation, Nº1 de Chanel L'Eau Rouge, Nº1 de Chanel Revitalizing Serum, Nº1 de Chanel Rich Revitalizing Cream by Chanel

Chanel offers its N°1 collection as a complete line (six items shown) that combines skincare, makeup, and fragrance mist with a new star active ingredient: red camellia, which prevents and corrects the appearance of aging. The formulas are clean, the packaging is eco-designed, and the jars and bottles are lightweight. Every item (from $45 to $125) aims to revitalize and restore. "Each step is a delight to the senses," notes Simone Chen of *Marie Claire* China.


N°1 DE CHANEL
ESSENCE LOTION AU CAMÉLIA ROUGE
N°1 DE CHANEL
SÉRUM-EN-BRUME CORPS AU CAMÉLIA ROUGE
N°1 DE CHANEL
N°1 DE CHANEL
SÉRUM AU CAMÉLIA ROUGE
N°1 DE CHANEL
L'EAU ROUGE
N°1 DE CHANEL
CRÈME RICHE AU CAMÉLIA ROUGE



U.S. Winners

The Best Blush by Jones Road

Bobbi Brown developed five talc-free blushes to enhance the natural flush in a range of skin tones. Mission accomplished. The soft, pillowy powder makes The Best Blush ($28) a perfect option for those looking for buildable coverage with a subtle hint of rose.

Boosting Liquid Mask by Susanne Kaufmann

Give dull skin a second wind with the help of the Susanne Kaufmann Boosting Liquid Mask ($125), which is comprised of stem cells from a Swiss apple variety known as the "apple that does not wrinkle," red algae extract, and hyaluronic acid to protect against dry skin, for a softer, more radiant visage.

Dior Addict Lipstick by Dior

For those who prefer high shine, Dior Addict Lipstick ($42) boasts six hours of gloss and 24 hours of hydration, making it a great pick for any statement-making occasion.

Hydrating Body Cream by evolvetogether

Dry, flaky skin is a thing of the past. One dollop of the evolvetogether Hydrating Body Cream ($48) will hydrate and protect, while the forever-recyclable aluminum tube minimizes waste.

Age-R ATS Air Shot by Medicube

The Medicube ATS Air Shot ($280) does exactly what it says: blasts your skin with a shot of air using a needle-free, pore-tightening device. The end result? Brighter skin with accelerated skincare absorption.

SUSANNE KAUFMANN
Boosting Liquid Mask
evolvetogether
MONACO
HYDRATING BODY CREAM

Cleansing Complex Polish by iS Clinical

Centella asiatica, a powerful antioxidant in the iS Clinical Cleansing Complex Polish ($48), helps prevent the signs of premature aging, while the soothing botanical extracts help silence the anger of an unexpected breakout.

Hair Alchemy Fortifying Treatment Serum by Oribe

On your face, serums work hard to reduce wrinkles and fine lines, but this Oribe Hair Alchemy Fortifying Treatment Serum ($66), composed of ingredients such as chia seed, bio-fermented bamboo leaf, and plant-based protein, creates a protective veil around each hair strand to improve elasticity.

Shine & Protect Hair Cream Oil by True Botanicals

The True Botanicals Shine & Protect Hair Cream Oil ($52) delivers exactly as promised, creating a glossy shine without weighing hair down. Its milky consistency, made up of potent antioxidants, glides along strands for easy application.

Vital Skincare Complexion Drops by Westman Atelier

Delivering breathable coverage—without a hint of dryness or redness—is the name of the game for Westman Atelier's Vital Skincare Complexion Drops ($68). Use it to secure light to medium coverage with a radiant finish.

Urban Environment Sun Dual Care Oil-Free Sunscreen SPF 42 by Shiseido

Shiseido's Urban Environment Oil-Free Sunscreen SPF 42 ($48) protects against harmful UV rays and pollution—without any white cast or threat to your pores.

Transatlantic Winner

Nu Lip & Cheek Balmy Tint by YSL Beauty

Consider this tint ($26) a hybrid of the best worlds: a subtle pop of rose for your cheeks and a creamy tinted lip balm. It serves up hyaluronic acid with a low molecular weight, allowing the formula to deeply penetrate your skin.

DISCOVER MORE
DÉCOUVREZ-EN PLUS
LIP & CHEEK
BALMY TINT
BAUME TEINTÉ
LEVRES & JOUES
YSL BEAUTÉ
28I, RUE SAINT HONORÉ
75008 PARIS
LONDON W6 8AZ
TSA 75000 93584 ST OUEN CEDEX FR
MADE IN FRANCE
24M
0.5 fl.oz. ℮ 15 ml
NU
YVESSAINTLAURENT
NU
YVESSAINTLAURENT

MAIN PHOTO: ZOE KOVACS. MODEL: ELSA GELHARD/VIVA MODEL MANAGEMENT. CASTING: ARTHUR MÉJEAN. MAKEUP: AMÉLIE MOUTIA, ASSISTED BY GABRIEL. PHOTOS: GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK

Officine Générale jacket, pants; Chanel Fine Jewelry earrings.

Kerry Washington Is in Her Enlightenment Era

After decades in Hollywood, the actress sees things differently now.

BY JESSICA HERNDON **PHOTOGRAPHY** BREYONA HOLT

While in a shoulder stand in yoga class back in the '90s, a 20-something Kerry Washington attempted to scan the room looking for proof she was extending as high as others. Noticing her inquisitorial struggle, the instructor said, "If you don't stay on your mat, you will literally break your neck. Stay on your own mat in class and life." The sentiment stuck with Washington, now 46, though she admits it's taken time to sink in.

"There's something about getting into my 40s where I am starting to see you only get this one life," says Washington, after kicking off her lug-sole boots on a rainy Saturday and sinking into a plush couch in a Pasadena hotel suite. "To spend this one life wanting to be anybody

Michael Kors Collection bodysuit, pants; Chanel Fine Jewelry earrings; Gianvito Rossi shoes.

Gabriela Hearst dress; Chanel Fine Jewelry earrings.

other than me, and not be where I am, doesn't benefit me," she adds. "To focus on what's over there means I'm ignoring my gifts, and this garden of my life doesn't get to flourish. What's mine is mine, and it's beautiful."

Finding enlightenment in her own lane doesn't mean slowing down, though. She is, after all, from the Bronx. "We are sort of the underdog borough," she says, her incredibly fly gold chrome nails impossible to miss as she gestures while talking. "I don't think you'll ever meet somebody from the Bronx who doesn't have a little bit of a hustle. We are always ready to build, create, figure it out."

Lately, for Washington, that means starring opposite Delroy Lindo in the just-out Hulu dramedy, *UnPrisoned*. She plays a therapist and single mom whose fresh-out-of-prison dad moves in with her and her teenage son. Washington's interest in producing and starring in the series was led by her desire to "unpack dynamics of returning citizens through this comedic, loving lens," she says. "Given how massive the prison industrial complex is and what a huge problem it is in this country, I thought this is something a lot of people can relate to." She was also tired of the lack of Black father-and-daughter narratives on TV, adding: "I thought it was an important story to tell with joy."

As a kid, Washington loved performing in children's theater. She even received an acting scholarship to college, but her real focus was on the anthropology of performance, majoring in social sciences like psychology and sociology. By her 20s, though, she was determined to make it in Hollywood, and took flexible jobs as a substitute teacher and restaurant hostess so she could chase roles. Landing parts in films like *She Hate Me*, *Ray*, and *The Last King of Scotland* set her career in motion. But playing the lead in *Scandal* made her a household name.

Still, she wasn't fulfilled. Throughout her acting career, Washington remembers immersing herself so much in the characters she played that she neglected to focus on her personal growth. "I've made a career into being other people because being other people is comfortable for me," she says. "Being in myself, being with myself in my own body as myself, is a much newer adventure for me. When the job ends, the movie's over, and the incredible run of the historic TV show ends, it's important to have a self to go back to." Which is why she says she is now "prioritizing myself as the lead character of my own story."

To do this, she's putting in the work. Part of that involves finding ways to move beyond negative thoughts, which, for Washington, often come up in two ways: "One is lack of faith that everything's good. This idea that I have to do better or be better to be lovable or acceptable, as opposed to trusting that my best is enough. And then I have a history of healing around body image and perfectionism."

Her ability to weather less-than-positive self-talk relies on practices like "prayer, meditation, therapy, journaling, or spending time with other people in growth situations—doing the work," she says. "I have to be doing that work. As an executive, entrepreneur, parent, wife, for me to show up in those places requires that I'm willing to constantly be doing self-inventory and face my stuff. If I'm in a place of faith, self-love, and radical acceptance, shit doesn't bother me. I can take a risk, and whether it goes well or doesn't, I'm good. It's about the journey, letting go of the result, and trusting your lane is yours. But if I'm not doing the work to be in a faithful place, then it's much harder."

Speaking of risks, Washington is here for them. "Part of being an artist, being a creative person, is constantly being willing to be a beginner and do things you've never done, be in situations you've never been, stretch, grow," she says. "I'm so attracted to that kind of work, but it is also so fucking scary."

She doesn't let fear hold her back, though. And her dedication to choosing culture-shifting projects is one of her greatest strengths and a significant source of pride. "Even in the beginning of my career, I would say I'd rather work another shift at the restaurant than do a movie that is going to be bad for women or Black people," says Washington.

This page: Officine Générale jacket; Chanel Fine Jewelry earrings. Opposite page: Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello dress, shoes.

After becoming the first Black woman to play the lead in a network drama since the '70s, by starring in *Scandal*, Washington recognized that portraying Olivia Pope meant she was "part of something transformative and culturally significant," she says. She launched her production company, Simpson Street, in 2016 with a similar goal. "We are trying to expand our vocabulary around what a protagonist looks like and is, and to upend the idea of other," says Washington. And she is, with projects on her

“When the job ends, the movie’s over, and the incredible run of the historic TV show ends, it’s important to have a self to go back to.”

This page: Prada dress, shoes. Opposite page: Christian Dior dress; Chanel Fine Jewelry earrings.

For shopping information, see directory.

Fashion Director:
Sara Holzman
Hair: Takisha Sturdivant-Drew at Forward Artists using TSD Hair Extensions
Makeup: Carola Gonzalez at Forward Artists
Nails: Kim Truong at Star Touch Agency using Dior Vernis
Production:
Samantha Rockman

imprint like the Emmy-nominated *Little Fires Everywhere* and the drama series *Reasonable Doubt*.

But running a production company hasn't been without its challenges. "I'm a trained creative person, but I've had to learn how to lead, inspire, and communicate with teams," she says. An executive coach and pals like the co-CEO and president of Ariel Investments, Mellody Hobson, *Little Fires Everywhere* co-star Reese Witherspoon, and director Melina Matsoukas, who Washington shadowed before stepping behind the camera to direct *Scandal* and *Insecure*, have been great resources.

Now, to inspire her team, Washington abides by these fundamental principles: "Honesty, transparency, authenticity, accountability. I try to communicate with compassion," she says. Pilar Savone, Simpson Street's vice president of production and development, says of Washington: "She's incredibly talented and more focused than anyone I know. She's very conscious

[CONTINUED ON P. 113]

Tag, You're It

One company is using clothing labels to help keep the fashion industry accountable—and garments accounted for.

BY SARA HOLZMAN

Clothing tags. Those skin-scratching additions to our clothes that have rarely saved us from shrinking our favorite shirt. Those generic labels so overlooked that many are purposely designed to be conveniently ripped off. At least, until now.

Natasha Franck, the founder and Chief Executive Officer of the software platform EON, saw an opportunity to use clothing labels as a way to add transparency and accountability to the style industry; a solution to help make fashion more sustainable using something that already exists. Her idea was to tag a garment with a unique digital ID in the form of a QR code, NFC tag, or other data carrier that, when scanned, gives consumers important knowledge about their item. Like information about the clothing's fabrics, supply chain conditions, amount of water used to make the item, and point of sale.

In addition to historical and material information, the digital ID provides consumers with care instructions, repair guidance, and resale options tailored to that specific item, which could extend a product's life or keep it from getting tossed into landfill. A big problem for the fashion industry, since it's estimated that 21 billion pounds of textiles produced each year end up in the trash. "A digital ID delivers transparency about that product, where it came from, and what you should do next," says Franck. That might mean a second or third life for a garment through buyback programs or recycling recommendations. "We need every product and material to be accounted for, so it can be stewarded and managed throughout its life cycle," she says. "Digital ID is the core enabler of this next-gen world."

Almost five years ago, sustainability-focused fashion designer Gabriela Hearst became EON's first client when she saw digital ID's potential to allow for more transparency and traceability for her eponymous clothing line.

"It was essential for us to be able to tell the story of each piece of clothing to our clients," says Hearst. "Even though I am passionate about the subject, it was hard to gather this information otherwise. We put so much effort into sourcing materials and ensuring they're responsible when developing a collection. [Digital ID] can now allow people to learn about the fabric, the mill, and the factories behind each item and what they're doing to ensure workers' rights and safety."

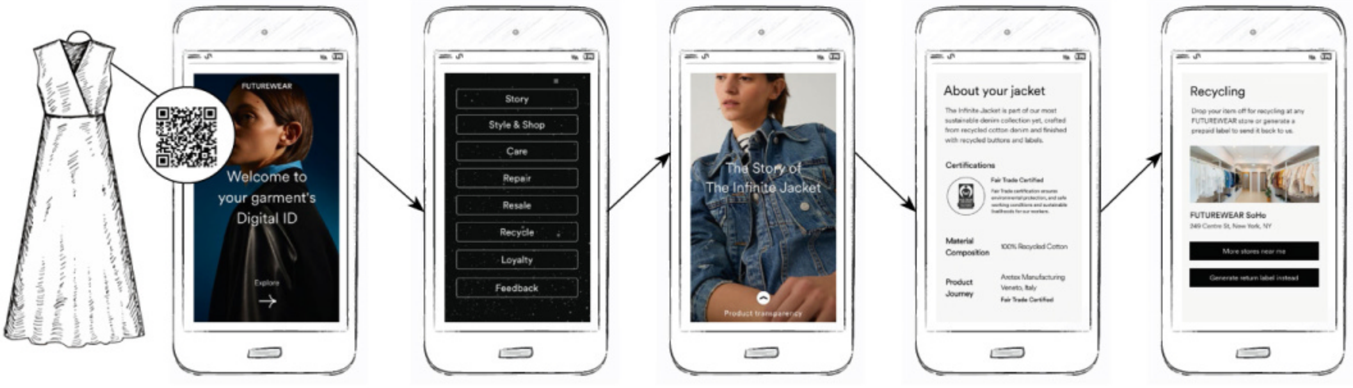
Since then, EON has continued to build a network of brands whose shoppers are able to unfurl a garment's entire ecosystem in seconds. Among them Chloé, Mulberry, and YOOX Net-a-Porter Group. "It's becoming an understanding within the industry that [digital ID] is an obvious future," says Franck.

That became even clearer in March of last year, when the European Commission announced a policy proposal for the standardization of Digital Product Passports as part of their Circular Economy Action Plan. The proposal will require retailers to publish information on products' environmental impacts and life cycle, intending to disrupt the destruction of unused goods.

But here in the U.S., without widespread policy change, it will be up to individual brands to decide whether they want to adopt the use of digital tags. Like most things, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. But Franck is hopeful that more and more designers will be open to putting a (digital) label on it, adding: "It's exciting to have it feel like digital ID is reaching a bit of a tipping point." Now is the time for the fashion industry to accept the challenge of becoming more responsible—and to run with it. **mc**

> "A digital ID delivers transparency about that product, where it came from, and what you should do next."

HIGH (TECH) FASHION



The Infinite Jacket is part of our most sustainable denim collection yet, crafted from recycled cotton denim and finished with recycled buttons and labels.

Drop your item off for recycling at any FUTUREWEAR store or generate a prepaid label to send it back to us.

This is what a garment's digital ID looks like. You can find it on the tag of your item (if it was produced by a brand that uses the technology).

A scan of the QR code with your phone will take you to a microsite with various resources, including care instructions, styling tips, and nearby repair shops.

You can also find important information, like where your favorite piece was manufactured, if it has any sustainability certifications, what materials were used, and what working conditions are like for employees of the manufacturer.

When you are ready to part with your piece, its digital ID will help you find tailored recycling locations and buyback programs, so it doesn't end up in the trash.

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Will the Real Taylor Swift Please Stand Up?

On social media, celebrity lookalikes are garnering fans and fame. But when you're constantly being mistaken for someone else, it can change how even you see yourself.

BY OLIVIA MESSER

While scrolling through social media in bed one evening, I came across a post of a somber-looking Taylor Swift from the *1989* era. All cat eyes and red lips; signature blonde bob dusting her chin. In the background, a stripped-down version of the song "Maroon" from Swift's *Midnights* album played, as she stared in the mirror and began to take off her makeup.

Except, it was not Taylor. It was Ashley. One of the many Taylor Swift impersonators and lookalikes on SwiftTok—the portion of the app devoted to unpacking the singer's lyrics, debating music video Easter eggs, and posting lookalike content.

Of course, there's Ashley (@noitisashley13—did you catch the Swiftie inside joke?), who is arguably the most popular. The 29-year-old married mother of two has more than one million followers on TikTok—and adorable cats that look just like Swift's. The resemblance to the superstar is so uncanny, Swift's own mother has commented on their similarities. There's also Julie (@juliiieanne), a 24-year-old who lip-syncs Swift's songs to her 305K followers while wearing ornate, sparkling, incredibly accurate costumes to the ones Swift has worn on tour. There's the tattoo artist who designs Swift-related body art and the up-and-coming singer-songwriter who covers Swift's music, and so many more. And it's not just that they look like a celebrity—it's that they're able to earn money, certain levels of fame, and opportunities through leaning into that likeness.

The online impersonator economy is not unique to Swift superfans, either. There are Ariana Grandes and Dove Camerons and Adam Drivers. Kim Kardashians (et al.), Kate Middletons, and Christina Aguileras.

As I continued to watch Ashley's video, it wasn't just her *wow* resemblance to Taylor that caught my eye, though, but a block of text that appeared on the screen: "How do you not lose yourself when everyone is constantly comparing you to a celebrity?"

Impersonators are as old as the concept of celebrity itself. Just look at all the Vegas Elvis Presleys. But it's reached new heights thanks to technology, says Joshua Gamson, Ph.D., a sociologist at the University of San Francisco who has long studied celebrity and fandom in contemporary culture. Unlike the "fan clubs" of the 1960s, where even the most rabid groupies were, at most, attending concerts and writing letters, social media enables today's fans to engage in ever-present ways. That ups the ante—and audience—for celebrity doppelgängers, who are often superfans themselves.

"Social media makes it particularly easy for 'fan' to become someone's identity and then probably their central identity," says Katy Coduto, Ph.D., an assistant professor of media science at Boston University who specializes in social media and interpersonal connection. "There's a concept in my area referred to as 'identity shift,' where what you post online starts to become your 'real' self."

The idea is that the more we present ourselves in a certain way online, the more we behave in line with that presentation privately and in real life. "As you're posting online, you're getting feedback," says Coduto. "You're getting likes and comments. If we post things online, even if they aren't a critical part of us, they *become* a critical part of us."

> "The more we present ourselves in a certain way online, the more we behave in line with that in real life."

The identity-shift theory was coined in 2008, but it's reminiscent of the famous Kurt Vonnegut quote from 1961: "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."

By definition, identity shift is "the process of self-transformation resulting from intentional self-presentation in a mediated context," according to a 2021 article in the *Journal of Media Psychology*, wherein the "mediated context" is now TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and dating profiles.

The authors state that "individuals feel more beholden to self-presentations that are visible to others," especially when these are persistent, authentic, and validated by external feedback. Subsequent studies also found that "confirmatory feedback" from a person they know—or believe themselves to know—"evoked greater transformation," as did committed and persistent messages targeted to a narrow or deliberate audience.

Of course, there are limits and caveats for how this process works. You cannot, for example, "identity shift yourself to believe you are an asparagus stalk," as the study noted.

But Kylie Jenner? People might believe that.

All of that said, it's not just that constantly being recognized as a celebrity could change your relationship with your identity—though that's possible—it's more that being constantly *misrecognized* could "feel really encroaching on your own sense of identity," says Sharrona Pearl, Ph.D., an associate professor of bioethics and history at Drexel University and a theorist on the face and body. "One might want to be really careful about that relationship."

Sofia Divene (@sofiadivene_), a 25-year-old Los Angeles-based TikToker who has a striking resemblance to Christina Aguilera, believes she "went through an identity crisis" when she began to post as the pop star. Mainly because she was so young. "I was still figuring myself out, and when I started to go viral, there were a lot of mean things being said about me and a lot of assumptions about me, too. I got a lot of people asking, 'Why can't you just be yourself?' It hit hard because I really didn't know who I was."

Now, she only posts as Aguilera *sometimes*. "I don't want to be held to one niche where I live in someone else's shadow," she says. "Don't get me wrong, I love recreating the looks, I love how happy it makes my following, and I have the utmost respect for Christina, but I want to be known and valued for being myself and my work."

Of course, role playing is also just fun. Allegra "Pi" DuVal (@dearbritney), who started out tribute-performing and dancing live, has been able to market her Britney Spears impersonation material to a global audience through TikTok and Instagram. DuVal, 34, already looked like the star, but in her content she is truly performing, with full costuming and makeup. She makes her own outfits,

> “We’re all kind of overly crazed fans of something. How do we decide what things are or are not okay?”

bleaches her hair, hits the gym, and studies dance routines in order to make her shows stand out. Her lookalike work has taken her all over the country, where she performs as Spears.

“The best part is getting to pay tribute to an artist I have looked up to for years,” she says. “These people may never get to see her perform again—or at all—and seeing the joy Britney brings is so heartwarming.”

DuVal knows she “might look similar to Britney and emulate her” to her nearly one million followers, but she still feels like her own person with her own life goals, interests, and tastes.

In some ways, it’s less about adopting someone else’s identity and more about finding a stronger connection to your own. “On some deep level, there’s a search for kinship,” says Pearl. “The only people who really look like each other are identical twins, and we have a biological narrative for that. So what if you could find someone else who looks like you?” And so, sometimes, the benefit of impersonating a celebrity means comments and likes from the artists themselves, money, and fame, but sometimes it means a feeling of community that they otherwise wouldn’t have tapped into.

And who’s to say what’s too much when it comes to how we choose to present ourselves? “We have a history of accusing people who are ‘too’ interested in pop culture or light things as having no identity,” says Elena Maris, Ph.D., an assistant professor of communication at the University of Illinois at Chicago and an expert on media technology and pop culture. “We’re all kind of overly crazed fans of something. But how do we decide what things are or are not okay? To paint yourself blue for a sports team isn’t often seen as ‘crazy.’ What about being a Trekkie and wearing your costume to your con?”

June, a 36-year-old TikTok creator based in New England, dabbled in professional work as a Taylor Swift impersonator, attending events for lookalikes, impersonators, and tribute artists. She says she was even scouted for a network TV show. In public, she’s been mistaken for Swift several times, including times where the fan was tearful or shaking. Last year, Swift herself liked one of June’s TikToks.

At her followers’ request, she would post images of herself in certain outfits or makeup looks Taylor had worn. But it eventually “got to be too much,” says June. “If you even remotely resemble a popular celebrity and play into it, people will try and bring you down. Sometimes it’s jealousy, sometimes a hyper-protective fandom, sometimes another lookalike on a burner account trying to make you feel insecure because they see you as competition, which is ridiculous.”

According to Maris, music fans in particular tend to be really protective. There are thousands of people for whom “Taylor Swift Fan” is their identity. And as Coduto points out: “They are so passionate that they feel like they know her and have a parasocial relationship with her.” And that can heighten a sense of responsibility that they feel to defend the star.

DuVal occasionally gets a different critique from some Britney Spears fans—in particular when the star herself is struggling: that her impersonation videos aren’t ethical. Which does raise the question: when does an impersonator become an imposter? How much of a person’s identity is okay to replicate before it becomes more than just *borrowing* it?

As June explains it, “I always tell people that I’ll take a photo so long as they know I am not Taylor, nor am I claiming to be. I’m always flattered people mistake us or see a resemblance, but I never want it to come across like I’m actively trying to run around fooling people or claiming to be someone I’m not. I have way too much respect for Taylor than to do that.”

But online, June is no longer obliging. She’s transitioned to a new TikTok where she focuses on fantasy content. “I think a balanced and full life outside of a career or side hustle, regardless of what it is, is so important,” she says, adding that it’s necessary to have a “mindful perspective of what it means to share your life online, lookalike or otherwise.”

And that’s the thing. These impersonators are “just dealing on a larger scale with the question of identity that we’re all dealing with,” says Maris. The struggle of how to present ourselves on dating apps or Instagram or Twitter. Or anywhere. Navigating that can be complicated, even without the extra layer of having a famous doppelgänger. Although, when it comes to doing that successfully, maybe we should embrace the words of Taylor Swift (the real one) herself: “*You’re the only one of you. Baby, that’s the fun of you.*” **mc**

[WHICH PHOTOS IN THIS STORY ARE *REALLY* TAYLOR? FIND OUT ON P. 113]

ART: DAVID GRAHAM. PHOTOS: GETTY, INSTAGRAM @TAYLORSWIFT, @JUNIPERS_CASTLE

Di + Cheryl + Jane

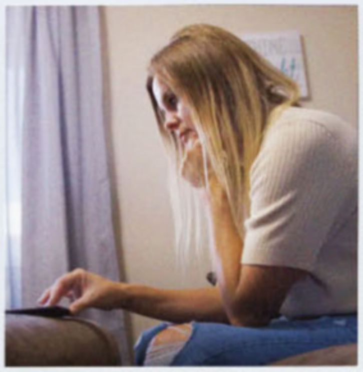
Carley

Kimberly

ON THE RECORD

With marie claire

Jada



Amanda

Lim

On The Record With Marie Claire
Plucked from the magazine's archives, this seven-part video series tells the impactful stories of women seeking justice, from the perspective of the very women who have lived it.

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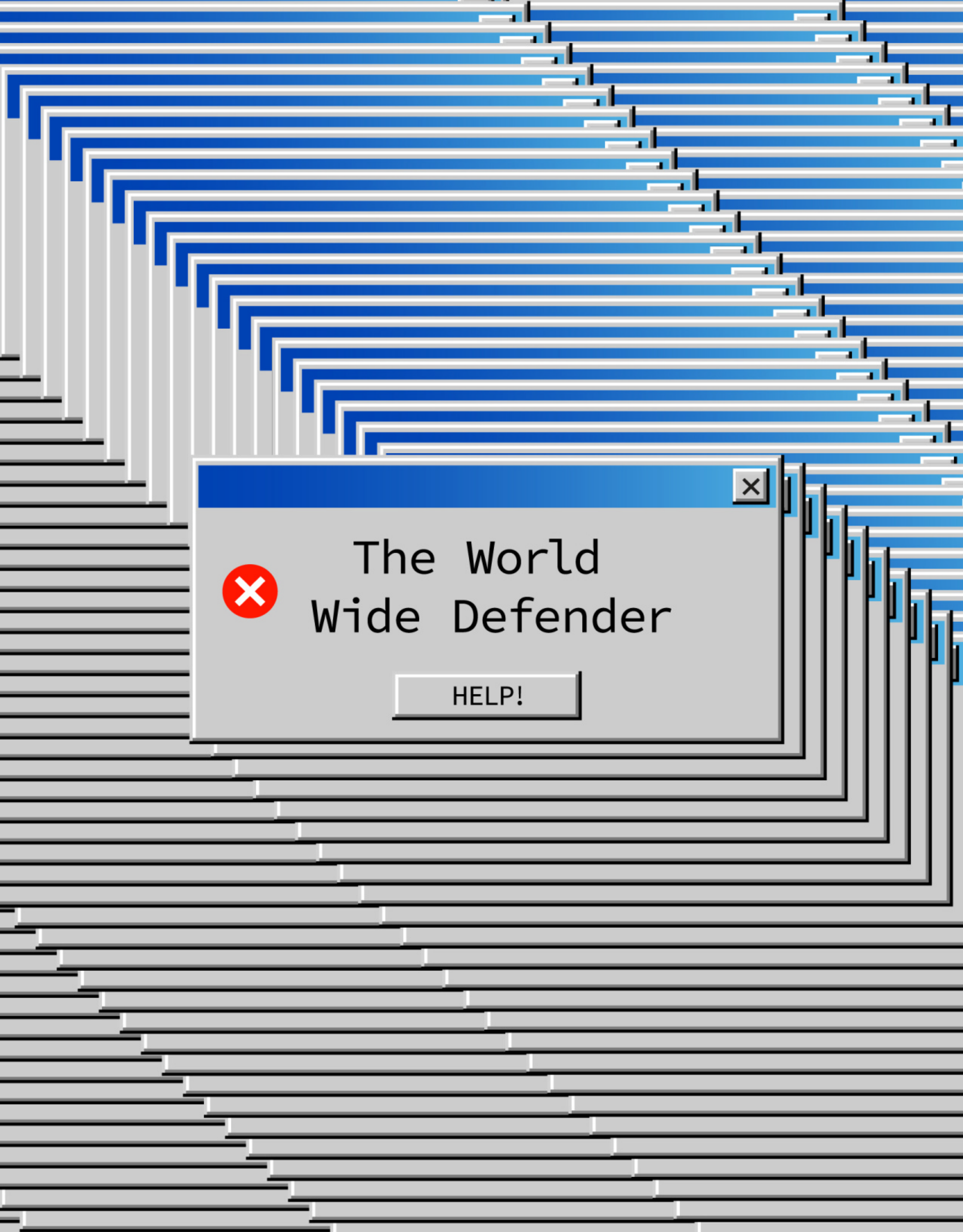
Children gone missing or murdered—their moms united in grief; a photographer scammed out of thousands of dollars; a woman who defected from North Korea—only to show up in propoganda months later: These are just a few of the stories that play out in our first season.

Scan the QR code to watch all 'On The Record' episodes on Marie Claire's YouTube channel, now.



The World Wide Defender

As the go-to lawyer for victims of internet injustices, Carrie Goldberg has become every creep's worst nightmare.

BY NEHA PRAKASH

Victims' rights attorney Carrie Goldberg has all the makings of a bonafide superhero. An inconceivable origin story involving a vengeful ex, a stolen identity, and Goldberg's own wrongful arrest. Diabolical villains in the form of "psychos, pervs, and trolls." And her catchphrase? "I sue rapists." (She already has the merch to match.)

Her undeniable superpower is defending identities, which Goldberg's honed for the better part of the past decade, blazing a trail in privacy justice litigation. The 45-year-old, along with a small-yet-mighty law firm, helps victims of internet crimes (think: cyberstalking, sextortion, and defamation) get protection, while simultaneously challenging big-bad tech Goliaths (think: dating apps, social media sites) to take legal accountability for the abuses they allow to happen on their digital turf.

Speaking from her Brooklyn-based headquarters, Goldberg—wrapped in a bubblegum pink blanket (let's call it a cape)—shares advice on what to do if you find yourself being targeted by an offender; what she fears will be the next frontier of internet identity crime; and reminds us that with great technological power comes great responsibility.

How would you explain what your practice does?
My law firm focuses on gender-based violence and on people who have been the victims of catastrophic injuries. Usually when we think about catastrophic injuries, you're thinking about somebody who's been physically traumatized. But most of our cases pertain to sexual and emotional trauma—people who've been sexually assaulted; whose lives have been taken over on the internet.

How did you get into this type of law?
I got into this work because of my own involuntary education. I had an ex-boyfriend who was on a scorched-earth attack, rampage against me. Even though I was already an attorney—I represented at the time elderly people—I needed an order of protection and I needed help with getting him arrested. I needed help trying to prevent him from making good on his threats to post videos online. I couldn't find an attorney who had all those different skills and it was terrifying and lonely and a source of great anxiety, that even though I had good, smart attorneys, these facts were novel to them—this idea that an ex-boyfriend would be using the internet to spread intimate images and spread lies. And so, not having somebody who was like—"Oh, we see this all the time. We know what to do. It's going to be okay."—made the legal system its own trauma.

When I got to the other side of that, I was really in a low place where I didn't want to go back to my old life and my job at the nonprofit. It just struck me: to start my own law firm to help people who, like me, needed to escape and be safe from somebody attacking them.

What are the most common cases that your firm is dealing with?
We have a lot of cases where somebody's being stalked by an ex—they're just being viciously texted and stalked on social media. So we get orders of protection for people. Instead of suing for money, or doing a criminal proceeding where the goal is to get jail time for the offender, the goal [here] is just to be left alone. I really feel that the right to be left alone is such a fundamental right that should exist.

Then we're doing lots of work trying to get nude images that have been posted online without consent, getting those down. We sue predators… advocate for offenders to be criminally prosecuted, and for victims to have their day in court.

The other category of cases, where so much of my passion lies, is protecting the powerless against the powerful. The most powerful sectors of our society, of course, are our institutions and industries. I think one of the most shocking things for me when entering

> "I really feel that the right to be left alone is such a fundamental right that should exist."

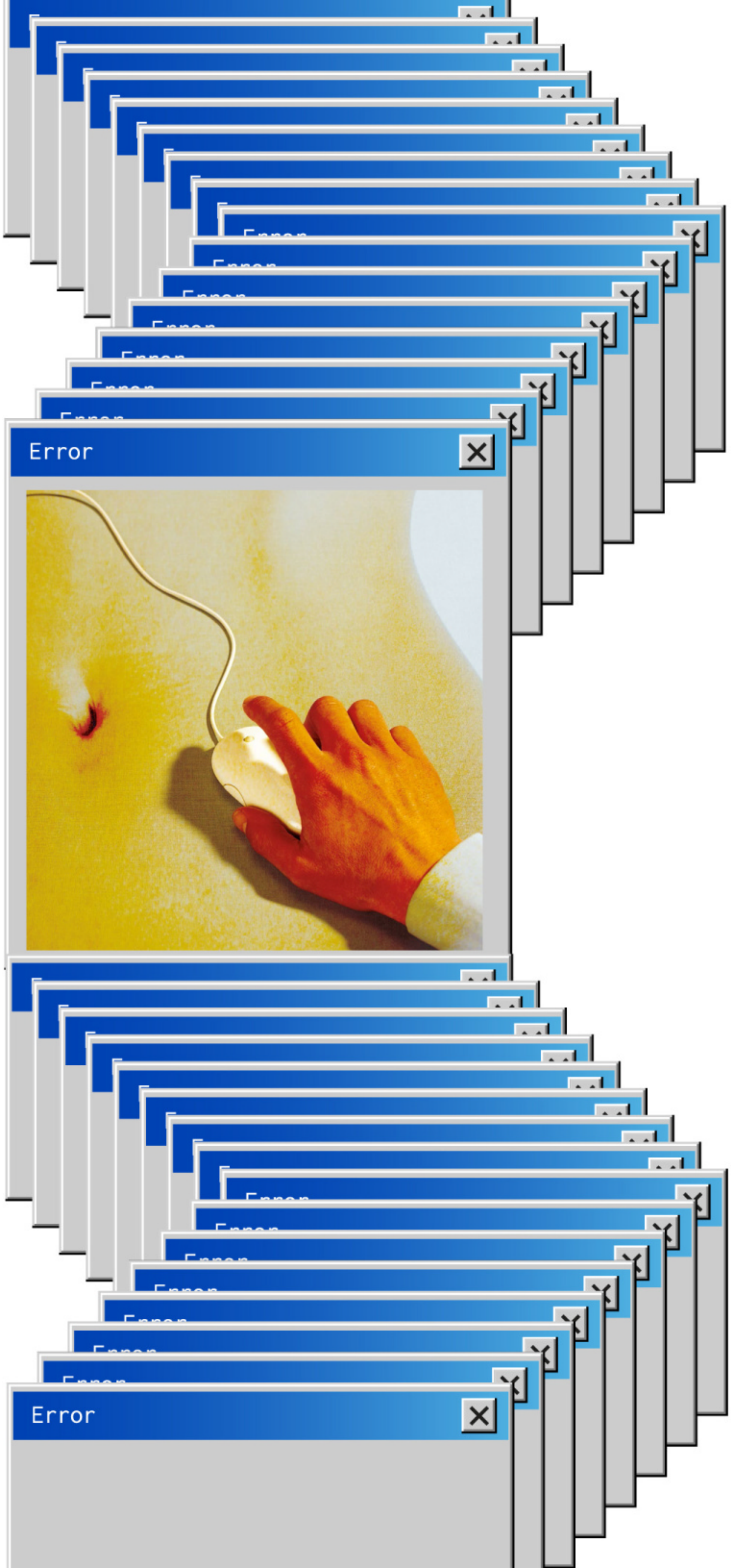
this work was that victims had no recourse against those platforms [when naked pictures or information is published] because of a federal law that immunizes [the company or app]. I spend tons and tons of time just trying to get those laws changed and trying to find wedges to sue the tech companies, because they're the most powerful players when it comes to the scalability of offenders who are trying to hurt other people online.

What are some of the more shocking cases you've worked on or you felt have been really landmark in the fight for privacy justice?
One of our most mind-blowing cases was representing a man, Matthew, whose ex had stolen his identity and created accounts on Grindr, and then used those accounts to send strangers to Matthew's home to sexually assault him. The ex would say in his profiles that Matthew liked hardcore sex and had rape fantasies. Matthew was getting as many as 23 visitors a day, at his home and at his job. He worked at a restaurant in Manhattan and [the dates] would come and disturb his peace, thinking he'd set up a sex date with them. Some of them were really tweaked out, frightening people. A lot of them were just innocent guys who thought that they were there for a hookup, but some of [the dates] wouldn't go away, and his roommate was assaulted at one point. This happened over 1,000 times over the course of several months. Matthew had gotten an order of protection. He reported it to the police 10 times, but this guy just continued to co-opt Matthew's identity this way.

We ended up suing Grindr, and their lawyers told us that they did not have the technology to ban a user, which was shocking to us. This was 2017. We lost that case. We appealed and appealed and appealed, and tried to get the Supreme Court to hear it, because it was more than about this one incident. It was about the liability of our tech platforms to keep people safe. Although we lost, in this case, the theory of holding tech companies liable has succeeded for us in other places. In many parts of the country, it's a generally accepted idea that these platforms or products should be liable the way that any other product is. Sometimes, the only way to change the law is to take on novel cases and develop novel ideas.

Another situation was my client, Michelle. Her identity was stolen by her ex and his wife. They impersonated her and made it look like she was stalking them. And then they started making false police reports. She was arrested and went to jail for 88 days and was facing life imprisonment because they made it look like she was sending people to [rape his new wife] using Craigslist. [The cops] didn't confirm the IP addresses or the fact that a lot of evidence was just being forwarded, but it was totally fabricated. Eventually, a new detective was assigned to the case, and he was like, "This is really fishy."

Michelle was ultimately exonerated. We sued the City of Anaheim, where this all happened, for them



doing such a terrible job with their digital forensic evidence, because again, this goes to a person's identity. With the internet, it's so easy to falsify, so when police get a report, it's on them to have the policy systems and procedures to verify.

In the nine years you've had your practice, do you think the legal system has gotten better in dealing with and approaching these cases?
A lot has changed. Nine years ago, there were only [some] states that had non-consensual porn laws and now 48 do. [In March 2022] President Biden built into the Violence Against Women Act recertification as a way for victims of non-consensual porn to sue their offenders, so there are legal tools that are at our disposal. Also, for instance, we have our staff member, Annie, who does judges' trainings, so judges are learning about the intricacies of online harms and online abuses. It's always a race between bad things that are happening in society and making sure that the law is evolving so that victims can use the laws as a tool to get justice.

Have you seen cases involving AI abuse?
So far, most of the clients we've had who've been targets of deepfakes have been celebrities whose faces have been transposed onto porn videos. I know there's going to be an evolution where it stops just being used on politicians and celebrities, and it's going to become more of a way to victimize and impersonate non-celebrities, especially as the AI becomes easier to use and more accessible. I think it's just going to be a new way to torture people, and also to manipulate the truth and spread misinformation and disinformation.

What kind of legal claim do we have to our online identities?
There's certainly the intellectual property right that we have to images of ourselves and then there's the privacy right. In terms of intellectual property, a lot of people don't realize that they don't actually have the intellectual property to their own images unless they were the ones who took the picture. So whoever takes the picture, on whomever's device, actually owns the copyright, automatically, without having to register it to that image that's produced. We certainly don't have control over our online images to prevent somebody from screenshotting pictures of us, re-appropriating pictures of us, manipulating pictures of us. You don't have to even be on social media to be vulnerable to this. If your friends are posting pictures of you, or your parents or siblings are posting pictures of you, then your image is out there. And if you didn't take that picture, you don't have a lot of legal recourse to demand that it be removed, so long as you're an adult. But you can seek legal recourse if those images are being used as blackmail, harassment, stalking, or assault.

Can you preemptively defend yourself against this or do you think the only way is for the legal system to create those boundaries first?
There are cracks in the law. [For example] we have laws in almost all of our states that prevent the non-confidential sharing of nude images, but what happens when it's your head on somebody else's nude body? Then suddenly those laws don't apply. When it comes to deepfakes, there are no criminal laws that really apply well. The law is not keeping up with technology, but also what we criminalize is usually a signal of what we as a society decide is unacceptable. I don't feel we're at a point where there's enough understanding about the harm and damage that can be caused by deepfakes. We don't have victims coming forward. I don't think it's really being seen as a serious harm to people because it's not really their body.

Are there any effective ways to safeguard against internet crimes?
The more private your settings are on social media and the more strict you are about allowing in anybody you don't know, the more protected you're going to be. There's just always going to be a balance between our public selves and our desire for privacy. The more public we want to be with our images, the more risk we are in—that's going to be a different calculus for everybody. It's always an option not to be on social media, as well. And when you're in a relationship with somebody who you don't know enough to trust, be discreet with what images of yourself you share. If it's a nude image, maybe don't put your face in it; don't stand in front of your college diploma. Think before you share and think before you click. And really the onus should be on the other person to not be abusing technology. Technology is a weapon. Where would we be without it? It's how we shop and date and communicate and play games. However, it's also a weapon and, with it, comes a whole lot of responsibility. **mc**

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

> "It's a race between bad things happening in society and making sure the law is evolving."

PHOTOS: NATAN DVIR, GETTY, SHUTTERSTOCK

Carrie Goldberg is taking a stand against online abuse.

What can you do if you learn that someone is attacking your identity online?

Goldberg breaks down the steps you can take to gain control of the situation.

1 Take a deep breath and tell someone you trust. You never want to deal with humiliation alone. A friend can help you gain perspective over it.

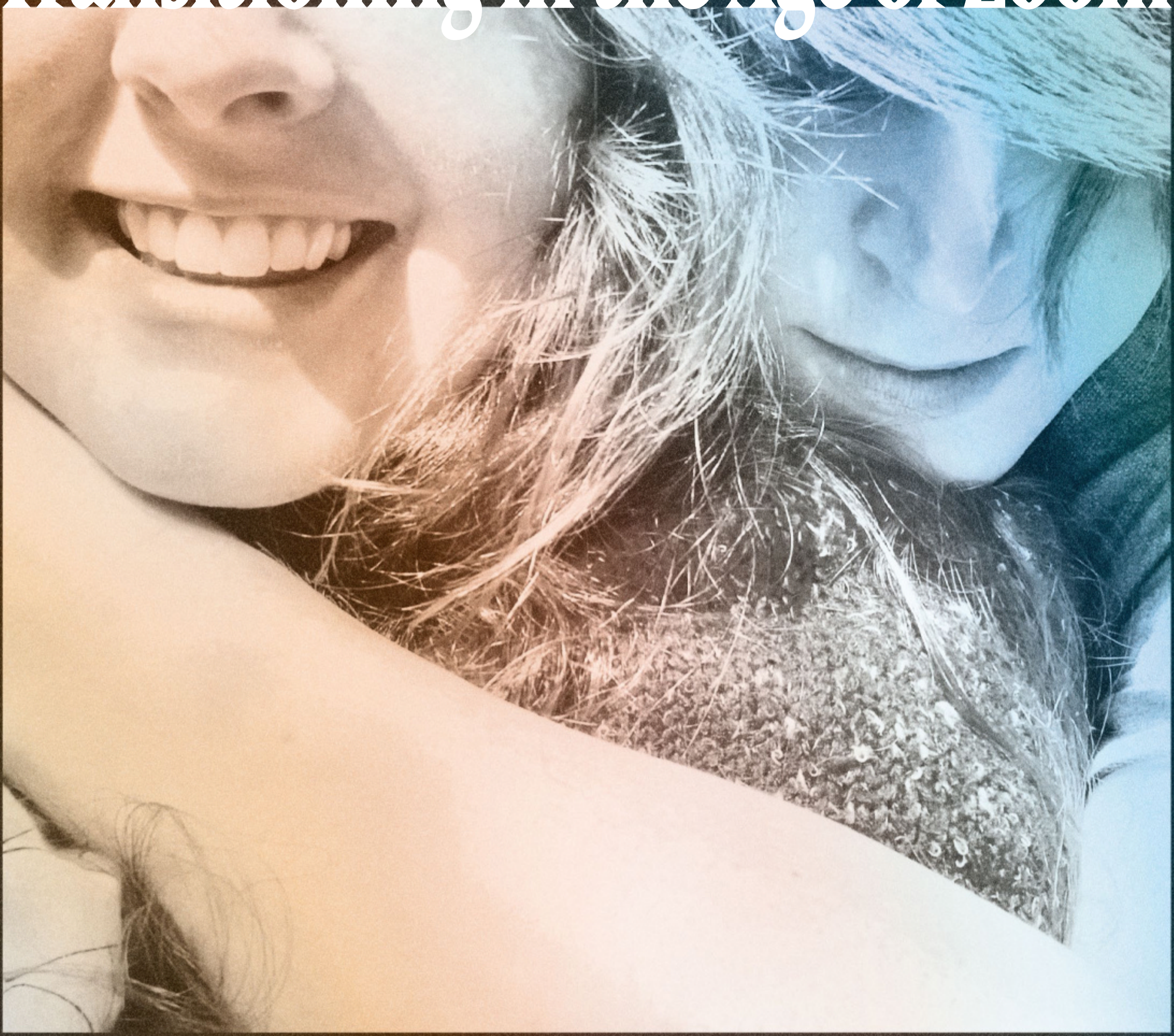
2 Take screenshots. You'll need evidence of what's happening if you go to court.

3 Report it. If the exploitation is happening on social media, use in-app methods to flag it and get the content removed.

4 Get help. If you feel you are in physical danger, call 911. If there is continuing online harassment (nonstop DMs, endless texts), contact law enforcement or a victims' rights attorney.

5 Be kind to yourself. Shut down notifications, reroute emails and messages, and enlist friends and family to monitor the situation.

Transitioning in the Age of Zoom



Revealing changes in your gender presentation can be complicated when you haven't seen family or coworkers in person in months...or even years.

BY LAUREN ROWELLO

I nudged my wife, Brenan, as the alarm blared through our bedroom, tousling her bedhead and reminding her that she was late for work. She stood up with a stretch before plopping down in front of a lighted mirror to apply foundation, mascara, and a bold red lip. It was the height of the pandemic, when we were all still in quarantine, and she worked from the living room, liberated from the button-ups and neckties expected at the office. She shaved her beard, grew out her hair, and chose clothes that felt affirming and empowering.

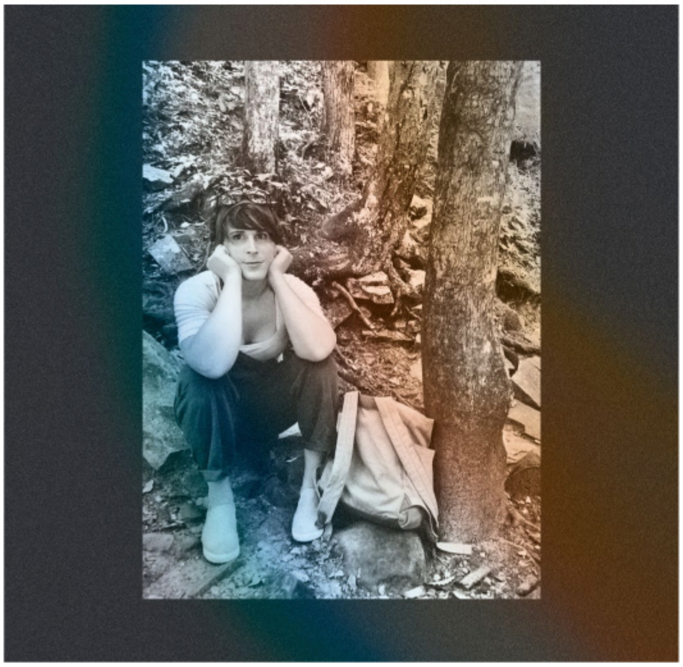
Brenan started hormone replacement therapy a few weeks before the Covid-19 lockdown began in our state. And so, when her office closed in March of 2020, a week before her 30th birthday, she breathed a sigh of relief at the idea of spending more time alone. It gave her space to get acquainted with her body's changes and to experiment with new looks, without the pressure to blend into society's gender norms, which wasn't an issue at home. She didn't have to fear rejection the way she might have if she were still leading in-person meetings as a cybersecurity executive at a growing firm.

It was the first time my wife lived without the burden of other people's expectations, and this enabled her to develop a strong sense of who she is. For LGBTQ+ people who were quarantining with supportive friends, family, or a partner, it was "an opportunity to better explore and understand themselves," says Jeffrey Cohen, Psy.D., a clinical psychologist at Columbia University Medical Center who sees transgender patients and has been leading a virtual therapy group for LGBTQ+ people since the pandemic began.

While the world has largely reopened, remote work remains. Many people are still taking meetings by phone or Zoom with the camera off, which means some of the pressures and cisnormative standards typically placed on my wife and other transgender people continue to feel less intrusive. But it has created a new challenge: how to navigate coming out to people who haven't seen them in months or years.

At first, my wife avoided it, retreating to the virtual world. She started showing more of her authenticity on Twitter, where she developed a support network and some sense of community among transgender people and allies in cyberspace. "Before sharing these aspects of myself online, my gender was really a private experience," says Brenan. "That was a way to experiment with coming out in a more anonymous way, without the risks of coming out in the real world."

After all, nearly one third of gender-nonconforming people have been mistreated in public spaces, according to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey, a study administered by the advocacy group National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE) which examined the experiences of transgender people over the previous year. And one in five avoided neighborhood amenities, including gyms, stores, entertainment venues, public transportation, and medical centers, because they feared mistreatment. Fifty-nine percent avoided restrooms for the same reason. Homicides against transgender and gender-nonconforming people surpassed a record high in 2020, and then again in 2021, according to the Human Rights Campaign, showing just how dangerous it is for transgender people to live an authentic life.



In the early days of the pandemic, Brenan found comfort in having time alone.

> "Before sharing these aspects of myself online, my gender was really a private experience."

Brenan initially wanted to talk with her colleagues in person. Email or text, which is largely how she'd been communicating with them in the pandemic, didn't feel the right way to share such intimate information—but by the time the company started to plan to come back together, it had been nearly a year. By then, her voice, gait, mannerisms, and style had changed dramatically, and she was afraid that showing up as herself to the office would become an uncomfortable grand reveal. Even a video call felt like it would be awkward for her and a shock to others.

Then there was the uncertainty of how her boss and colleagues would react. "Until the very recent Supreme Court ruling, it was legal to fire a person on the basis of sexual or gender minority status in the U.S.," says Cohen. Despite achieving legal protection, transgender and gender-nonconforming people—especially those who are Black, Indigenous, and people of color—still experience invalidation and oppression at the systemic and interpersonal level, creating stress and increasing the risk for a negative mental-health outcome, he adds.

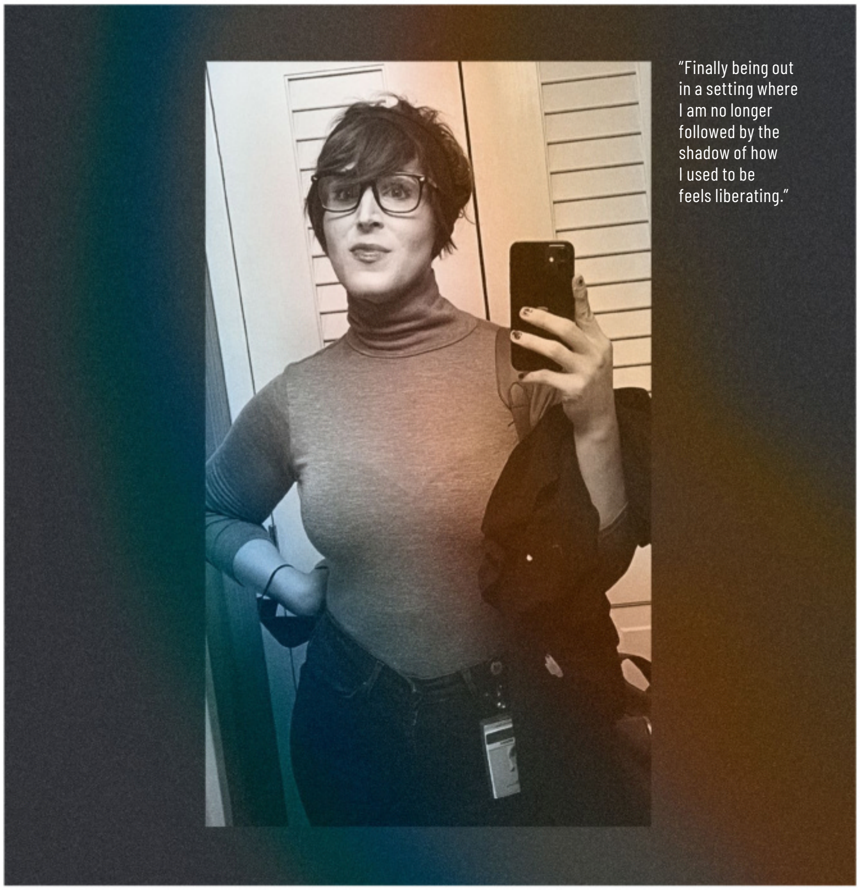
Approximately one in four gender-nonconforming people have experienced workplace discrimination, according to the U.S. Transgender Survey. Of employed respondents, 77 percent took steps to avoid problematic workplace encounters, including hiding or delaying a gender transition or quitting their jobs. Some people who transition operate as "stealth" to protect their careers—living authentically but not revealing their transgender identity in the workplace, sometimes ghosting former positions, coworkers, or community members to avoid confrontations.

Brenan finally decided to speak with a gay friend from work about her transition, and he was kind and supportive, but later admitted he didn't know what it means to be transgender and needed resources because he wasn't familiar with the concepts or her needs. The responsibility of educating cisgender allies in the workplace usually falls on transgender people themselves, who must try to self-advocate in order to shift workplace culture, often while dealing with stigma and discrimination in that same space.

After thinking about it, Brenan decided not to share her gender with other people at that company, partially because she felt it was harder for her to come out to people who knew her pre-transition. "When someone has a concrete idea of who you are, showing them such a different version of yourself feels awkward and can be a difficult adjustment in the relationship," she says. But also because she feared the tension that might arise with a return to the office.

Brenan and Lauren at a wedding in 2022—the first time Brenan saw many of her childhood friends since transitioning.

"There is no right or wrong way to come out or be out. Some people may choose not to come out in all contexts."



"Finally being out in a setting where I am no longer followed by the shadow of how I used to be feels liberating."

And so, after she found a position where she felt comfortable openly sharing her transgender identity, she quit. Her new team has offered her the support and encouragement she's needed to thrive. They prioritize authenticity and learning about each other's differences, supporting mental health, and promoting equity in the workplace.

Coming out is a vulnerable process. "No one is entitled to information about our identities, and it's each person's choice to decide who they want to share with and what information they would like to share," says Cohen. "There is no right or wrong way to come out or be out. Some people may choose not to come out in all contexts and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that choice."

Ultimately, that experience helped Brenan gain the confidence to come out to more friends and family too. Some of her relationships dissolved, but in September, we traveled to her hometown in Tennessee for a childhood friend's wedding where she was embraced.

"For many of us, work consumes the majority of our lives," says Brenan. "Most of my socializing, meals, and time awake are spent at work or with colleagues, so finally being out in a setting where I am no longer followed by the shadow of how I used to be feels liberating. Those first few months in my new job were really life-giving for me. It gave me a sense of inclusion and validation in a way that I had never known before." mc

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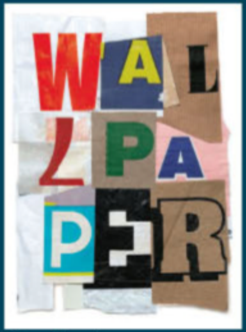
Zaha Hadid
W*88



Alan Fletcher
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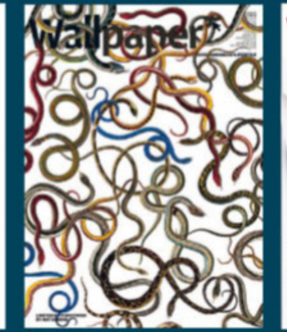
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Seasoned Style

With age comes wisdom—and a distinct, refined, and highly personal sense of fashion.

BY EMMA CHILDS **PHOTOGRAPHS BY** ARI SETH COHEN

Picture this: You're walking down the street when a remarkably well-dressed older woman captures your eye. Every detail, from the vintage brooch on her lapel to her leather loafers, feels purposeful. It's clear she knows exactly who she is—and wants the world to know too. These are the women street-style photographer Ari Seth Cohen lives to photograph for his blog (and documentary and book series), *Advanced Style*, dedicated to the senior sartorial set.

"I'm drawn to unique personal style that's developed over time," Cohen tells *Marie Claire*. "And, most importantly, the women I photograph dress for themselves more than anything else."

Initially started as a love letter to Cohen's grandmother, *Advanced Style* has grown into a worldwide celebration of sexagenarian-plus fashion fans. And, as the photographer notes, there's a subversion in spotlighting the fabulousness of maturity: "Showing these stylish women in their 70s, 80s, and 90s living vibrant lives focuses on the freedom and creativity of aging that's not shown in the media or popular culture. Because many of these women feel and are treated as if they are invisible. But seeing them dressed in vibrant colors and making such statements with their clothing is an antidote to the isolation forced upon them. There's a confidence and power in that—their style is a form of rebellion."

LANA TURNER

Age: 73 **Location:** Harlem, Manhattan

On how she puts outfits together...

I dress the way I do for me. There are things about my outfits that only I would know, that only tickle me, and won't be obvious to others. Because building what I look like has everything to do with the art of the moment. Of what I'm doing at that moment, how I'm living and thinking. Of who I am at that moment.

On when inspiration strikes...

Pieces just get lodged in my mind. It's sort of like when you're thinking, *Oh, when I get home tonight, I'll have tuna tartare for dinner.* And you're so excited; you can't wait because you can picture it so clearly. It's the same with my outfits. I've actually gotten dressed for church, left my house, gotten a block away, but then said, "Ah, I know exactly what the hat should be!" So I turned right around, went back home, and put on the right hat. Of course, I was late for church—they were already saying amen when I got there—but I was perfectly happy the rest of the day.

On honing your personal style...

Most people are trying to blend in. *I don't want to stand out. I want to be like her or him. I want to be this fabulous, to be this sexy.* But if you never saw any of those people, who would you be? If you never knew what other people did, how would you be? Strip all of that away, come up with who you are, and then find confidence in the ability just to be yourself.

LINDA RODIN

Age: 75 **Location:** Chelsea, Manhattan

On her ideal outfit…

Flared bell bottoms and a denim shirt from my denim line, Linda Hopp. I've just always loved denim; I remember wearing Levi's at age 5!

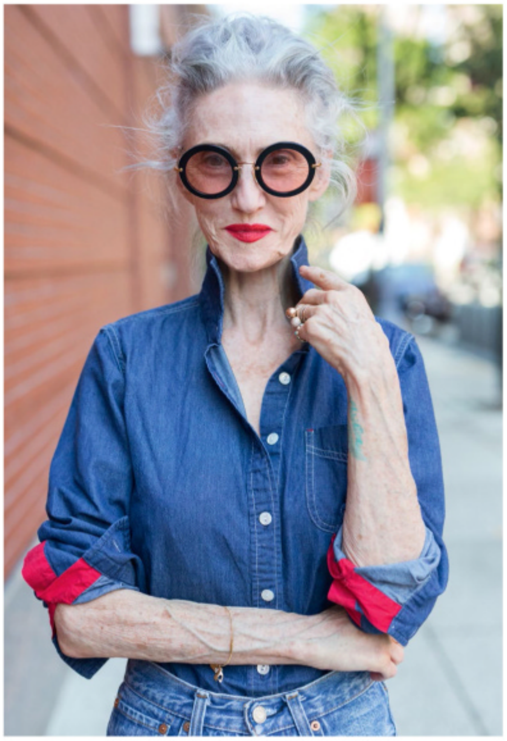
On her fashion identity…

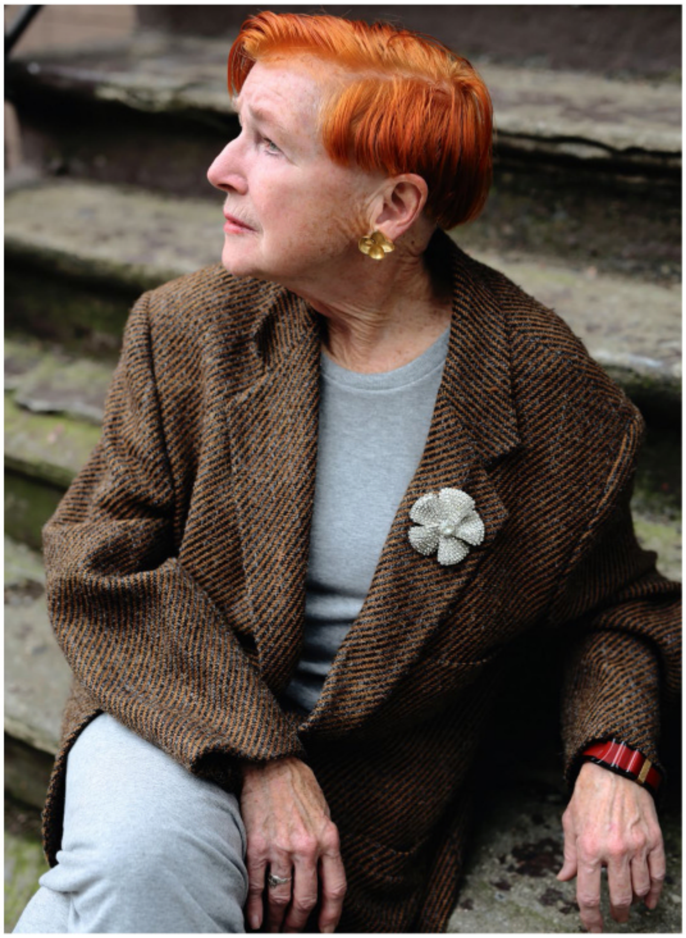
I like to be simple, clean, and modern, but always with a twist. I need clothes to have some personality. But I have no penchant for wearing something outrageous just to get noticed on the street. I'm never dressing up for anybody; I just want to wear clothes that please me.

On the myth of age-appropriate dressing…

I don't dress by decade, and I never feel I have to dress age appropriately. In fact, my style has always stayed the same. I look at pictures from when I was 20, and I even remember what I wore in seventh grade, and I'd wear all those outfits today. I haven't ever changed! Of course I've gotten older, but I've never defined myself by a decade or a trend or thought, *Okay, I'm 40 now. I better not wear that!* What difference does it make?

> "I have no penchant for wearing something outrageous just to get noticed on the street."





ALICE CAREY

Age: I'm in my late 70s. I never give the actual numeral. **Location:** Greenwich Village, Manhattan

On her uniform…

I believe in a uniform. Mine's a men's tweed jacket (I realized I look good in a man's jacket a long time ago and haven't stopped wearing them), black chinos, Doc Martens, and a big, fabulous brooch. And earrings —always, always earrings.

On only wearing secondhand clothing…

I don't buy anything new. It's a mission I'm on, so to speak. And I love wearing the clothes of somebody I love who has died. Some people don't get that and think it's creepy. But, no, it's not. If you loved somebody in life—if, when you'd have a drink with them or they'd come over for dinner, they always wore a certain blazer or what have you—you can love them in death, too, by wearing their clothes. It makes all the difference.

On maintaining personal style as you age…

As you grow older—I don't say growing old, as we don't grow old; we grow older—you know you're going to die sooner. You just do. And what happens is that a lot of people give up their style. And I find that very sad. They think, *We don't fuck any more. We don't have babies any more. My husband's left me; my next husband's left me.* And with all that dreary thought, you'll resort to a big black puffer coat where no one will see who you are. The thing about me, though, is that you see me coming down the street, and you think, *Gee, I can take a look at her. She's interesting looking.* But that'll only last so long, and I guess I'm aware of it. Try as you may and be as spiffy looking as you can for as long as you can.

ARLINDA MCINTOSH

Age: 65 **Location:** Montclair, New Jersey

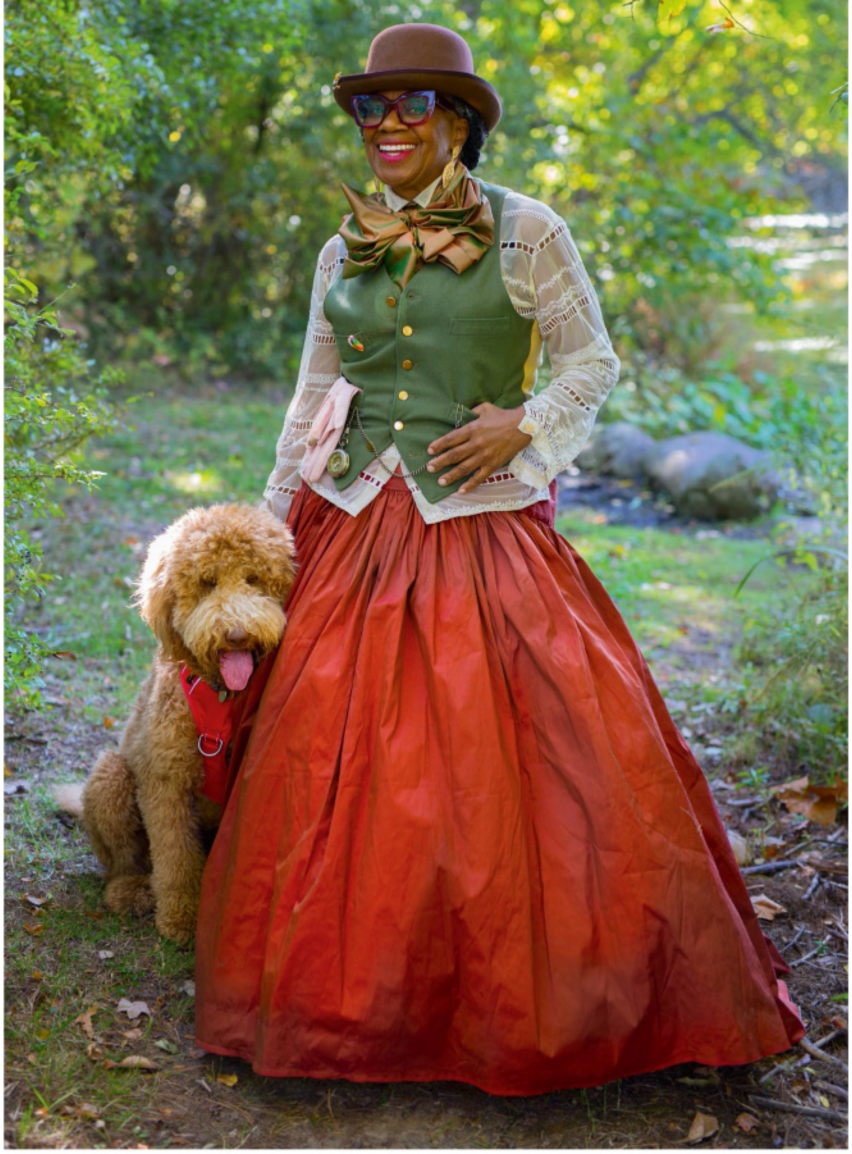
On following her personal instinct…

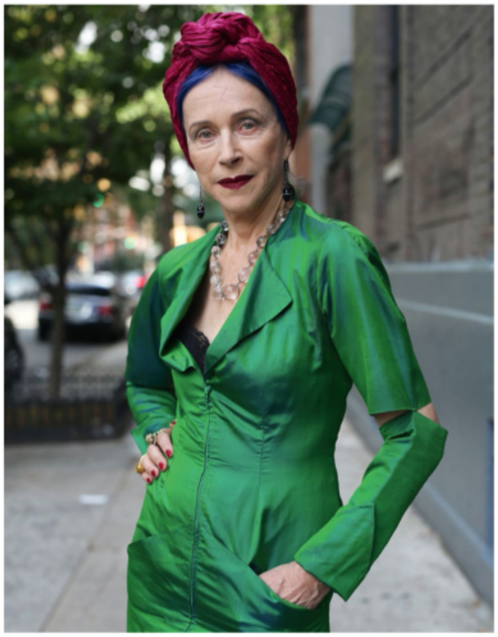
Aging through over six and a half decades of fashion has allowed me to play the field when it comes to clothing, from menswear to women's, mini to maxi, sheer and opaque. If it's of interest to me, I wear it. No fiber is off limits—clothing is all just fabric waiting to be played with. And I've always felt that way. As a young girl, I took my mom's kitchen curtains down and wore them because I liked the color. (They were a checkerboard print with these little roosters on them.) I would take the sheets off my bed, put a belt on, and wear them as a skirt around the house. I got in trouble for that one, though.

On dressing true to herself…

Our garments, our outfits that we put together, are silent conversations with the onlooker. Of course, that conversation is subject to opinion, but I don't really value what anyone else is thinking. The only conversation I'm interested in having, the only person I'm interested in impressing, is the one I see in the mirror. That's it. I don't know how to not be who I was born to be. After all, what value am I to me if I follow another's fashion rules as they relate to ageism, sexism, and all the other isms?

> "Our garments, our outfits that we put together, are silent conversations with the onlooker."





BEATRIX OST

Age: 83 **Location:** Charlottesville, Virginia

On how her love of fashion began…

I grew up in the war-torn city of Munich in the 1950s. There was not much clothing to buy or choose from. So I started making my own [clothes], but then hired a seamstress to make what I designed instead. People always asked me to become a fashion designer, but I just didn't like the business. And I needed to paint, sculpt, and act; I was one of those very versatile young *Biests*!

On her favorite item in her wardrobe…

My tie-up boots that I use for tango dancing! I enjoy tango—it's very much a silent conversation with your body. But it also has room for your own movement, for your own questions and answers with a partner.

On finding joy through dress…

I always dress for my own joy, when I'm at home as well as going to my studio, the town, or out for the night. And I am thoroughly amused by my so-called style; it is my second skin that I carry with me.

TERRI WONG

Age: 67 **Location:** San Francisco, California

On the oldest item in her closet...

It's a Chinese robe with a beautiful rooster embroidered on the front and back that dates back to the late 1880s.

On connecting with her heritage through antique clothing...

It's an homage to my background. I am Chinese American, but I was born here, and the only way I know about Chinese customs, clothing, or any of that stuff is what I've taught myself. Because when my family came here, there wasn't a whole lot they could bring with them. And, of course, old textiles and fabric were not something my grandparents would bring when fleeing the communists. As a consequence, I don't have any antique clothing from my family. The pieces I do have are what I've collected on my own.

On the outfit she felt the happiest in...

Oh, yes, that's a story. I'm a former opera singer, and when I left the opera chorus, I went on to make knitwear and restore antique clothing. And I found this antique embroidered Chinese coat in a beautiful cranberry-burgundy color and lined with rabbit fur. It was in pretty good condition, except the collar and cuffs were damaged. But I got a great price: I spent about a hundred bucks on it! So then, I used four different kinds of wool so the texture would look like fur and just made a new collar and cuffs. And the first time I wore that coat was to opening night at the opera here in San Francisco. I wore it with very simple black cigarette pants and a Western sort of pillbox hat in the same burgundy color. And I just felt like a little princess.

JOYCE CARPATI

Age: 90 **Location:** Turtle Bay, Manhattan

On her fashion journey...

I developed my style when I was very young. I went to study voice in Milan, Italy, when I was 17, and I couldn't take my eyes off the Italian women. Their beautiful suits, suede Oxford shoes, leather gloves, handbags, and pearls—these women just looked magnificent in their simplicity. And this was new to me; it was a style you didn't really see in America back then. So I thought, *Oh, my! This is who I want to be,* and I brought this Italian style with me back to New York. And I guess it's never left me. It's simple, but to me, it is true elegance.

On her fashion philosophy...

I like simplicity, and I've always felt that less is more, but you need some wonderful pieces for that less. For me, every day that's a pair of slacks, a scarf—I have many lovely scarfs!—and my pearls. My pearls are a part of me. Oh, and I adore my Chanel suits. They never go out of style.

> "I went to study voice in Milan and the women looked magnificent. I thought, *This is who I want to be.*"

MARSHA MUSIC

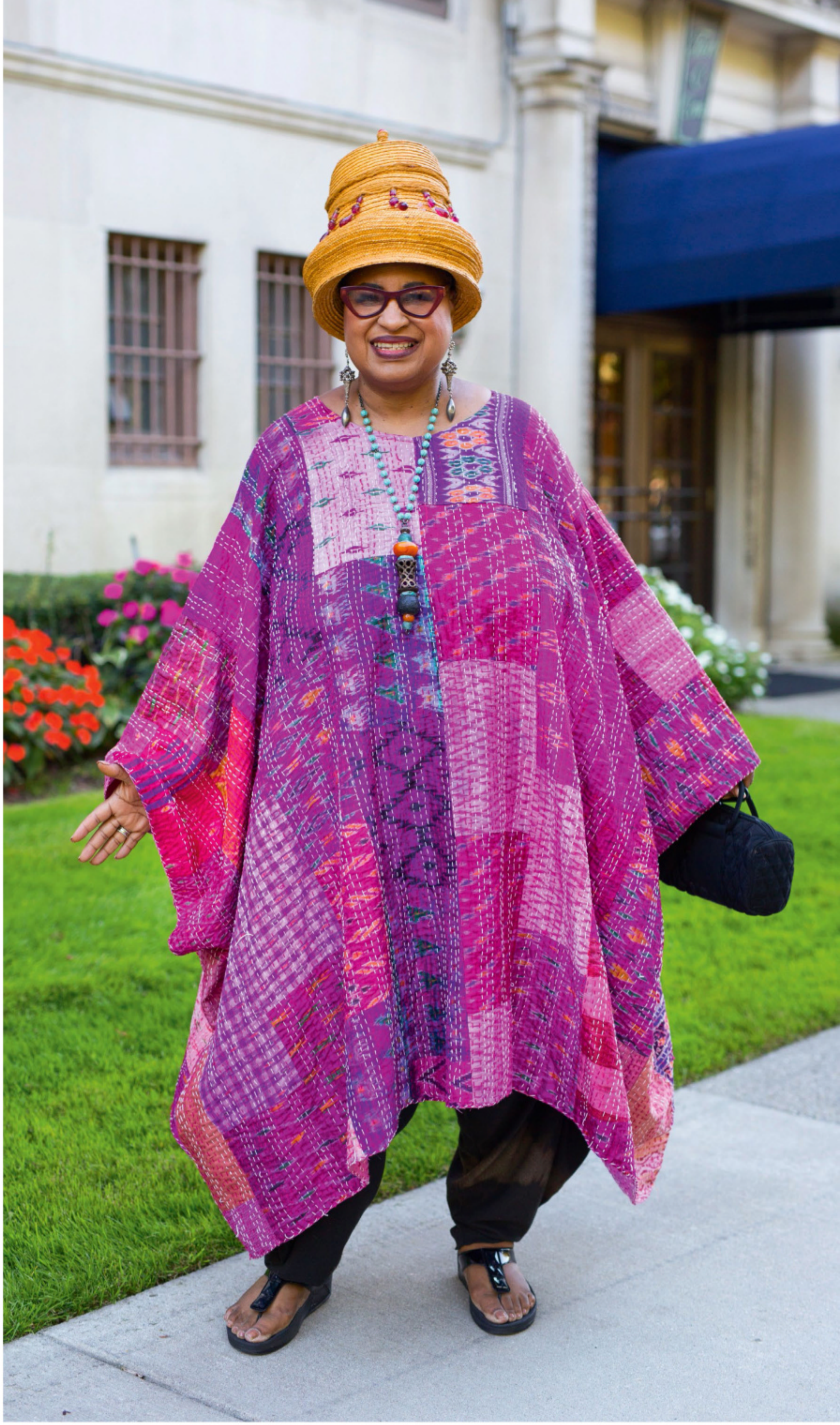
Age: 68 **Location:** Detroit, Michigan

On fashion representing one's identity...
You become carved out of the material of life as you have more experiences, both positive and painful. So, for those of us who enjoy dressing, that material can present itself through our clothing. And since you become more aware of yourself as you mature, that presentation becomes an expression of your real self.

On balancing dressing for herself and others...
I've come to increasingly dress how I want to, regardless of what others think. But on the other hand, I greatly enjoy the affirmation that comes from people enjoying how I dress. So it's a synthesis of both. It's being able to say, 'To thine own self be true,' but, at the same time, knowing that you are also dressing to please others; to be pleasing to the eye, to have other women be proud of the way you look, to go into an atmosphere and enhance the space because of how you have obviously taken the care to adorn yourself.

On the story of her style...
The way I dress is a collection of my life experiences, from when I was a teenager to being a young woman in nightclubs, to maturing into a professional woman. And over time, my look has assimilated elements of my past lives into what has congealed into my style today—which could be described as ethnic, Afrocentric, or Eastern, but mostly comfortable.

> "You become more aware of yourself as you mature; presentation becomes an expression of your real self."



Liv Hewson Is Worth the Buzz

When the Aussie-born actor was cast as Van in Showtime's hit Yellowjackets *the character was barely in the pilot. Now, Hewson's the scene-stealing comic relief and one-half of the show's It Couple—and they're prepared to take on an even bigger role in season two.*

BY JESSICA GOODMAN

Liv Hewson knows you want teasers for what's to come in *Yellowjackets*. They know you need the dirt on what happens to their character, Van, and how things fare with her love interest, Taissa. Yet, despite some cajoling, they refuse to let a single spoiler slip. "I just feel like a red dot is going to appear on my forehead any second," they joke over Zoom. Hewson is currently in Vancouver filming the final two episodes of the highly anticipated second season, which returns this spring. "The talking points I got were a list of things I *couldn't* say."

But here's the one thing they will confirm: Van survives.

It's an open secret but a welcome confirmation since Hewson was one of the breakout stars of Showtime's genre-bending series, which follows a female high-school soccer team that gets stranded in the Canadian wilderness and may or may not turn to cannibalism-slash-culty rituals as a way to survive. The story is told in alternate timelines: one set in 1996 in the immediate aftermath of the plane crash; one in the present day, when the survivors are in their 40s, dealing with all the ways the crash continues to impact their lives. (Those "ways" include murder, kidnapping, poisoning, conspiracy theories, amongst others.)

Hewson, 27, plays teenage Van, the team's tough-but-tender goalie. A beloved outsider with a crummy home life, Van fiercely protects the people she loves, has excellent comedic timing, and a do-anything will to live. Proof: In season one, Van has three near-death experiences—once in the crash, once in a wolf attack, and once when her teammates tried to burn what they thought was her dead body on a pyre. As Hewson says of their character, "It's a full meal."

But the depth of the role wasn't quite as obvious when Hewson first read the script. They had just come off a three-year run on Netflix's zombie comedy *Santa Clarita Diet* and had previously held supporting roles in movies like *Let it Snow* and *Bombshell*. Hewson originally auditioned for teen Shauna (the part went to Sophie Nélisse), but after a few weeks, they got a call saying the producers wanted them for Van, a character with only a few lines in the pilot. "I was like, 'Great, who's that?'" says Hewson. After going back through the script, the character clicked. "I had such a strong sense of who she was. I thought, 'I'm going to take very good care of her.'"

Once they were cast, Hewson had no idea if Van would make it through season one—or if audiences would ever get to see adult Van. "When we were filming the pilot, I was like, 'Well, I'm not going to be here for long. I'll die halfway through the first season, probably.' But that feeling actually freed me up because I was going to make the most of the opportunity."

Hewson quickly found ways to bring their own perspective to the character, often through improvisation and tweaked lines to better represent Van's defensiveness and determination. "The qualities that I could extrapolate from what it meant that she was an athlete and what it meant that she was the goalie were really important when I was making decisions about who she was as a person," they say. Hewson cites small moments like the way Van reacts during the plane crash (punching the ceiling of the plane after her mask doesn't deploy) or what she does during an all-team argument at a party (refilling her beer) as ways that made Van feel more realized from Hewson's point of view.

And while there was no mention in the audition script of Van being gay, Hewson says, "I remember reading it and going, 'That character is a lesbian.'" When filming the pilot in 2019, Hewson says they kept that in their mind, thinking, "I don't know if the show will ever talk about this, but I'll know."

They didn't need to worry since season one went on to heavily feature a complex and loving coming-of-age romance between Van and Taissa (Jasmin Savoy Brown), a future senator with violent night terrors. Through stolen laughs, clandestine hook-ups, and one tender instance of wolf-wound care (yes, really), #Vaissa's bond became a joyful light for many viewers.

"From the minute Jasmin and I found out Van and Taissa were going to be together, we were like, 'We are doing this for gay people,'" they say. "The two of us are really in charge of it and that's a very special feeling. It's quite cathartic to work on the kind of gay relationship that I really would have wanted to see as an audience member when I was younger."

Hewson grew up in Canberra, Australia's capital, and had always wanted to be an actor. "Storytelling and performing spoke to something inside of me that nothing else really did," they say. After eschewing college and drama school to act in friends' student films and indies, Hewson participated in several industry-focused workshops, where they met casting directors and their eventual manager.

But for the first few years of their career, Hewson thought they could never come out professionally as nonbinary, even though they were open with people in their personal life. "My close friends were using they and them pronouns for me, but nobody was [using them] at work. And it sucked," they say. "I genuinely believed I would have to lie about it forever. I expected that in order to work, I would have to keep it a secret." But eventually, the cost of staying quiet became too painful. "I was doing little things to try and make myself feel better, like putting my pronouns in my bios on social media. I realized I was living my life on scraps, and it wasn't enough because I was tucking myself away from the world, which was making me isolated and uncomfortable and a worse actor."

Once they did start telling people at work, they say, "Some days it's tricky and then some days it's wonderful beyond my wildest expectations. As I started speaking about it more, there was acceptance and love out there for me about my gender identity in a way that I did not expect."

That was the case on the *Yellowjackets* set, where Hewson says the environment is so unique because most of their castmates are around the same age. "We have a lot in common and we're able to relate to each other and then throw ourselves into this really intense ensemble piece, which is my favorite thing. I love being part of a team."

Though Van didn't have an adult storyline in season one, Showtime announced in August 2022 that Lauren Ambrose of *Servant* and *Six Feet Under* fame would play a grown-up Van in season two, indirectly confirming that fans can expect to see even more Hewson in new episodes.

"I mean, I love her," they say of Ambrose. "She was a real, high in the sky, dream possibility when people were tossing around names. I was superstitious about it."

Hewson and Ambrose didn't get to work opposite one another, but they did spend time talking about who Van was. "I really wanted [Ambrose] to have ownership over the character. I was like, 'What's your sense of who this person is in her 40s?'"

After all, older Van has been through all the shit that younger Van is currently going through, including a breakup with Taissa that we know is coming, since older Taissa (played by Tawny Cypress) is married to another woman. "The tragedy of *Yellowjackets* is that the things that happened to them should have been allowed to happen to them in a normal setting," says Hewson. "Van and Taissa should have been able to fall in love as young people and figure out what it meant for them without it being tangled up in this horrible tragedy that they're going through."

And what exactly is it that they're going through in season two? Well, Hewson won't say. All they'll share is this: "This season ratchets everything up in every sense of that expression. I think fans will be quite happy, actually. But I don't think I should say anymore." **mc**

"Performing spoke to something inside of me that nothing else really did."

PHOTOS: HADLEY ROSENBAUM

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The 9 Bag Trends of Fall 2022 to Reach For

Grab hold. These are the handbags to get excited about.

Startup Life Helped Me Heal From a Year of Loss

Tache founder and CEO Roxana Saidi details how delving into her wildly successful pistachio milk venture helped her soul heal from five subsequent tragedies.

'Love Is Blind' Contestant Andrew Used Eye Drops During an Emotional Scene, And Fans Are Convinced He Was Faking Tears

The 'House of the Dragon' Season 1 Finale, Explained

'House of the Dragon' Season 2: Everything We Know

Puffer Jackets That'll Keep You Warm No Matter

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Get award-winning features, thoughtful essays and op-eds, our recommendations on sustainable fashion and beauty, and buzzy interviews and reviews, delivered straight to your inbox.

"In Many Cases
In My Adult Life,
I Have Still
Been the Token
Black Girl"

In her memoir, Token Black Girl, ***Danielle Prescod*** *details what it was like to grow up in a predominantly white community and then go on to work in the beauty and fashion industry as a Black woman. Here, an excerpt from her recently published book, along with annotations from the author that reveal what she's heard and thought about since her story hit shelves.*

Afterword

I look back at my life and worry that so many of my personal relationships have failed because there was always something huge missing. That missing thing was me—me being my actual self instead of a fake robot who just wants to please everyone. I was always hiding something, always trying to dress up and disguise parts of me that were not likable. For a long time, that had to do with my Blackness. I felt that I could outperform racism, assimilate, and ignore it away. Then, predictably, there were Black people who thought I "acted white" and was a snob. I'm not exactly a snob, not in the ways I used to be, even though I've spent a lot of time admiring and acquiring nice things. That quality has nothing to do with wanting to be white. I have examined my relationship to white supremacy, and I can confidently separate my proclivity for luxuries from the influence of whiteness. Some will argue that capitalism and white supremacy are two heads of the same monster, and while I hear and honor that analysis, I still want to sleep on high-thread-count sheets.

You can't!

Examining the connection between white supremacy and capitalism is important, but so, too, is comfort.

Though it should be obvious by now, it still must be said: being Black is not a monolith. There is no rule book dictating how to show up as Black in the world. Over time, I have learned to accept the parts of my Blackness that are unique, to understand it's OK that my experience is different from the next Black person's, just as theirs is different from the next, and so on. And since I was brainwashed to think it could only be one way, it took a lot of work to get here. I have to forgive myself for denying the parts of me I thought would be rejected by my own community and, equally, the ones I thought would be rejected by white people. The complexities of race in America are not limited to a single experience, and it's my hope that we can craft a world where the media rallies in an effort to show that we can have many Black experiences.

Every experience can be a Black experience!

It is actually the media's responsibility to do this.

In 2017, I made a public pledge to read only books about or by Black people, as I had become all too aware that the things I found entertaining were too influenced by whiteness, and it had been that way for all thirty years of my life. I had to relearn history. Despite a lifetime of education that cost upward of six figures, there were so many things I still did not know. And since I spent a good amount of my academic energy studying up on fashion, beauty, and models, I ended up with little knowledge about the cancer of systemic racism, even though it was something that was affecting me directly. But as I got closer and closer to my professional goals, everything else mattered less. I don't want

At the moment I am writing this, the only living Black woman on the New York Times Bestseller List: Michelle Obama.

It should not be a personal project to do this.

another generation of kids growing up being served garbage about how kinky hair is bad and a big butt makes you a slut. Blackness is so demonized that we end up on an endless quest just trying to prove our humanity. And still, white people end up caring more about bees and dolphins and being vegan than they do about Black lives. They are desensitized repeatedly by the media and, from birth, affirmed by the notion that they are special, entitled, and perfect.

This is still true.

I do not think that any of this is a permanent state of being. If I didn't believe that people could change, I would not be doing this work. I have witnessed people changing. I, myself, have changed. Wanting to change and recognizing what needs to change though would be the first critical step that many people never decide to take.

Black women deserve a place in the beauty canon. It sickens me how normalized it is in this industry to have entire stories that do not include any mention of Black women. Runways with no Black models. Casting calls that say "no ethnics." It happens all the time. Yes, still. And this is because white women control the lion's share of content, and white men control the lion's share of the money. They are responsible for the casting and the hiring and do not see the value in making sure that Black women are, at the very least, appreciated.

Some people will insist this has changed, but tokenization and equality are not synonymous.

Returning briefly to the Doll Test, in 2010, CNN attempted to re-create the study, surveying children of varying racial backgrounds instead of just Black children. The results were the same as in 1940, suggesting that, though schools are desegregated, racist biases still encourage children as young as four to see Black as bad and white as good. University of Chicago professor Margaret Beale Spencer consulted with CNN, serving as the lead researcher on the project. She published her conclusions, finding that "white children, as a whole, responded with a high rate of what researchers call 'white bias,' identifying the color of their own skin with positive attributes and darker skin with negative attributes. All kids, on the one hand, are exposed to the stereotypes. What's really significant is that white children are learning or maintaining those stereotypes much more strongly than the African-American children."

And what happens to white children? They grow up to be white adults, consciously or unconsciously living in the way that makes them the most comfortable, always at the expense of someone Black. A four-year-old child is not a full-blown racist yet, but as we are all living under the system of racism, you can bet that bias and prejudice are baking. People, white people specifically, are extremely quick to declare themselves "not racist." It's a reflexive reaction to the accurate suggestion that they are racist. The funny thing is it doesn't matter who is racist and who isn't because the world is absolutely racist. If, for example, a population of people are drinking a contaminated water supply for generations, it would be reasonable to predict that this population would be sick. Their children would be sick. Their children's children would be sick. How can someone be "not racist" and have grown up reading books like those in the *Sweet Valley High* series or *Rain* without question or complaint? How can someone emerge "not racist" when they don't think anything of the headline: "Meghan Markle: Straight Out of Compton"? Magazines still exist to tell white women that they are the best and the most beautiful. It is not possible to emerge from a contaminated world with your thoughts completely unaffected.

I'm talking to you, Prince William!

White supremacy harms all people at the same rate.

I should not have to work to change any of this on my own, especially since, as the doll study shows, white bias is largely responsible for the way the world is interpreted. I should, instead, be joined by my sisters of any race who have ever felt invalidated, who know exactly what a crushing

And yet, most days I do, and it is very lonely.

I feel immense support from Black women, but not a ton from white women. The harshest book reviews on Amazon are from white women who don't want to examine their relationship with white supremacy.

rejection based on your looks can do to self-esteem. But just like when Stu ridiculed me at that dinner party as my white friends and colleagues looked on, I do not feel joined by the white people I grew up with.

Much more so now that I'm in New Orleans.

As I get older, I reflect more about the way my life has developed and the ways it will continue to develop. I still have many white friends who do not have any close friends of any other race. I see it when I am at their weddings, baby showers, and birthdays. Aside from their domestic help, their children will likely not interact with a person of another race, either, thus leaving the cycle free to continue. Eventually, these people's kids will meet a little Black child and inevitably make them feel inferior about their skin, hair, body, or something else. I worry about this often. That's why having conversations about race and racism matter to me. If you are not consuming media that is actively antiracist, you can be sure that it is somehow racially biased in favor of white people, and these issues will continue to be problematic for future generations unless that is changed.

In many cases in my adult life, I have still been the Token Black Girl. I work deliberately hard at not being this, but it is unavoidable with old friends' weddings, baby showers, kids' birthdays or activities. No matter how much I try to make people care about how harmful this is, they do not seek out non-segregated social circles or intentionally cultivate adult friendships with non-white people. Most of these relationships that exist are de facto and an overflow from adolescence. People seek what is most comfortable and usually that means socializing with people exactly like you. What this fails to acknowledge, though, is that in so many ways, we are more similar than we are different, an insight that I have received frequently from white people after the release of my book.

Taking control of your power to do this is so crucial.

After a lot of podcasts, retreats, and therapy, I've learned if we're ever going to get anywhere, we have to shed shame. The shame I felt about being Black and then the subsequent shame I felt about not being Black enough were both a hindrance to me. I needed a safe environment to feel like myself, and I got that for a fleeting moment when I decided to work at an all-Black company.

When I made the decision to leave behind traditional fashion publications, I was afraid I was disappointing people, but I had no more fight left in me. It had been squashed by years of suppressing anger over injustices, enduring racist interactions, and being forced to smile through it all. I was burned out. And all that had bled from work into my personal life. Leaving felt a bit like giving up, but that turned out to be some old, racist thinking. White media gives you legitimacy. Anyone who pretends otherwise is lying. The prestige of the *New York Times* and *Vogue* excites people.

In her memoir, *Negroland*, Margo Jefferson recalls how she felt when the publication *Ebony* was founded: "A separate world of Negro beauty and glamour did exist when *Ebony* arrived. I studied its cream, beige, tan, buff, brown, and sepia models. My favorite was Dorothea Towles… I admired her, I envied her, but I didn't worship her as I worshipped Suzy Parker. She was in *Ebony*, not *Vogue*. My white friends didn't know who she was. Diana Vreeland didn't have to know or care." Brand recognition and legacy are hugely important, especially when the entire world is governed by white supremacy. I have always taken a perverse pleasure in occupying a space that I know was never meant for me, knowing that my presence probably pisses people off. This is why I go to all my high school reunions, so all the old white ladies of Greenwich can see my face and know that even though they think they are very, very special, we all came from the same place. This is also why I felt like I was giving up when I went to work at a Black brand—but even there, I was presented with a new set of challenges. At BET, it was more difficult than ever to secure Black talent, who were swayed by the allure of the white media. I had to work to get invites to things I had been going to for years. Once I started working for a Black brand, the fashion industry decided I was irrelevant. That also stung, but honestly, it is still easier than having to break bread with actual racists.

Read this book!

This is why I take great pleasure in my visibility.

I missed last year :(

Even though that feeling of exclusion was difficult to stomach after decades of hard work, it's more difficult knowing that people with extremely racist pasts are drooled over by fashion media. It's more convenient for them to just forget, to rely on that collective amnesia, to

Instead, we need to defund and deplatform these individuals.

Very predictably white women are triggered the most by the contents of my book. Recently someone said that they found it "hard to read" and I mean, yea, I found it hard to live...so that's kind of awkward. The weird part though is the voyeurism in the people who were upset that I didn't suffer more. I wrote about a lot of difficult experiences but I did not highlight every bad thing that ever happened to me with this book. I was telling a very intentional story.

let beautiful and rich people apologize and chalk racism up to youth, stupidity, or substance abuse and just say, "Let's move on." But this is a continued affront to employees of color. Imagine the corruption in excluding Black media from access to talent and events, while the racists have several seats at the table and millions of fans. It's absolutely exhausting to work in that system. Black content creators and models are paid less, are worth less, and are made to know that by brands. They are seen as inferior and made to understand that. The messaging to them becomes "we need you, but we don't want you. The racists, though—we both need and want them."

The disparities would shock you.

There are white friends of mine who do not watch Black television programs that I love, like *Insecure* or *Atlanta*. This fact feels less stressful to me now that my world is bigger and I have a circle I can discuss Black things with. I also have a wide social media network. I can, for the most part, choose what to engage with. But in 2021, HBO Max is resurrecting the white emporiums of *Sex and the City* and *Friends* (a cultural touchstone from which I cannot seem to escape) so we can have Republican lawmakers push litigation around banning Critical Race Theory, while they continue to watch "classic" programs without any people of color.

They attempt to deal with race in clumsy ways.

It is absolutely critical that we improve our media literacy, that we start to train ourselves to read messages conveyed to us, whether overt or not. Understand what it means that the press attacks Meghan Markle and praises Kate Middleton. Combat your own biases constantly. Diversify what you watch and consume, especially if you are white. Do not feel threatened if Black women are celebrating themselves; join in. If something feels off, say something. Do not make it a handful of people's job to be constantly fighting this fight. They will get tired. They will lose. Reinforcements are necessary.

Early in 2020, a video went viral featuring a little Black girl who was four years old. She is getting her hair done as her hairdresser records the process on her phone. The little girl turns to the camera when she catches a glimpse of her reflection, and says, "I am so ugly." The hairdresser tells the little girl that she is beautiful, and that she should never say that about herself. The girl starts crying, as do, I'm sure, all the viewers. She is a baby. It's hard to even comprehend how she came to understand the concept of ugliness, much less to see herself as ugly, but that is a critical time in a Black girl's development, where an idea like that can stick. For me, the idea that I was fat stuck, and I spent a lifetime running from it. What if we could be taught to love ourselves the same way Jessica Wakefield from *Sweet Valley High* looked in the mirror and knew she looked perfect?

Now I love looking at older photos of myself with a new perspective rooted in self love.

One of the tools I use in therapy is to look at a photo of my younger self, age three or four, and try to say the things the voice in my head says: "You are fat." "You are unlovable." "No one wants you." "You are stupid." "You can't do anything right." "Fix yourself." Honestly, it's incredibly powerful. You would never say those things to a child, and if you would, then perhaps don't have kids. It brought a lot of clarity to realize I am always going to be that same little girl, and every time a new trigger comes up, I have to show up for her the way a loving parent might. I try to show up for her and for all the other girls who can't show up for themselves yet.

Just go on TikTok to see the practice.

Update! I have given up eyelash extensions but the manicures remain.

Of course, the other thing I want is for everyone to stop putting so much pressure on looks in general, but considering I sat in coronavirus quarantine crying about my manicure and my lack of eyelash extensions, I realize that the battle is going to be tough. I am still infected by the disease that requires me to look a certain way at all times in order to accept myself. I know I am still in the belly of the perfection beast, even if I have begun to pry open its jaws. In this culture, it is not enough to have working bodies and healthy lungs and teeth. We instead become consumed with how we can make these things perfect, as opposed to just being grateful that we have them at all.

Even as I say this, I know that, because of racism, it will always be a more difficult climb for Black women. I know Black women will always be under scrutiny for how they look, no matter how good they are at what they do, from both inside and outside the Black community. You can say all the right things and go to all the right schools and win all the right awards, but until people (and subsequently, the media) are retrained in the way that they examine and evaluate Black women, we will continuously be subjected to a demoralizing kind of patrol that tells us we need to outperform, outdress, and outshine—and it still will never be enough. How are we supposed to accept ourselves if the obstacles to progress are constant and at the hands of the enormous vehicle driven primarily by the press?

I still spend a lot of time begging.

Attention is also a currency so spend it wisely.

My questions are directed to the people I know have the power to influence who and what is represented in the media. Are you interested in making these things worse or better? Do you see how no representation and negative representation can have the same result? Are you willing to acknowledge the ways you benefit from this system, even if you are not a direct participant? Are you willing to acknowledge that mistakes have been made, and even if they have nothing to do with you, they still have everything to do with the way the world is structured today? Dignify me by saying you understand that things might be harder for me, and that you understand how you might be guilty of making them harder. I shouldn't have to beg anyone to have to see these issues, but since I know how ignored they are, I felt compelled to write this book.

Although I will shallowly admit that knowing women are paying thousands for the lips and butt I was teased about for years does give me a punitive sense of justice, I don't want to see anyone become a human pincushion. Whatever cocktail you're made from is made for you, and only you. And it's the media's job to accurately reflect the world we live in, not distort it. That's why I try my best, with whatever little power I have, to shake up and break up toxic beauty standards and encourage people to be more influenced by abilities than aesthetics.

Self love is truly transformational and 100% worth the fight.

I might never be satisfied with what I see in the mirror. But I post photos of myself, and even if I see a roll I don't like, I don't edit it out. I go on dates, and I don't wear any makeup. Now I like the parts of myself most that have nothing to do with how I look, and I make caring for myself a priority. This has made me a gentler person overall, one who no longer accepts abuse or abuses others. It is something I have to work on all the time. I have to constantly pull myself out of barbarous spirals of self-criticism, which is why I am adamant about encouraging everyone to take a step back and look at the way this environment endangers us. Let's account for the harms that have been done to us. And let's share in the collective responsibility of correcting them.

The most common thread that I find amongst Black women who read my book is the violence that institutions enact on individuals who they want to tokenize. In almost every case of women who attended either elite private or boarding schools, some overblown disciplinary action was taken against them and then they were silenced. They were silenced because of shame and also out of fear. I wrote about my experience with this because that also happened to me but I am no longer ashamed and I am no longer fearful because I know that I was not a "troubled kid" or "scary". I was a Black child with emotions in a white environment that was not prepared to acknowledge my humanity. Hopefully the book gives other people courage to do the same.

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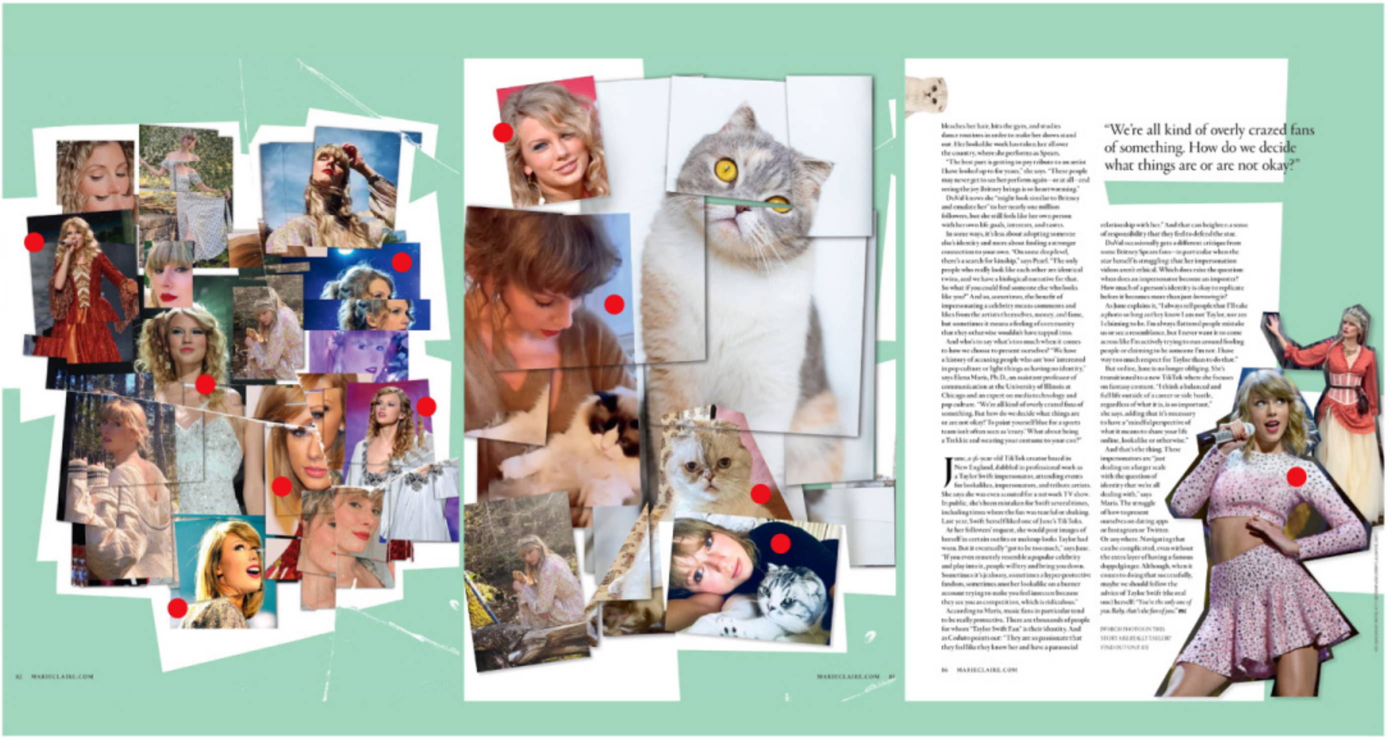
Will the Real Taylor Swift Please Stand Up?

Did you guess correctly? The photos marked ● show the pop star (and her cats!). The rest are lookalikes (seriously!).



"We're all kind of overly crazed fans of something. How do we decide what things are or are not okay?"

[CONTINUED FROM P. 79] that she's an artist and a businesswoman at her core, and she sets boundaries, making sure she has time to spend with her family [and] to be creative."

Remaining close with people who keep it real is also a part of Washington's happiness. "The thing you lose in these positions," she says of fame, "people stop wanting to be 100." But she's been lucky enough to keep a tight-knit crew for years. One girlfriend she's "grateful to be able to walk through life with," she says, is fellow actress Tracee Ellis Ross. The two, who have been friends for over 20 years, "share very vulnerably and intimately when there's rough moments," says Ross. They also celebrate each other's evolution. "I've seen her feet get more firmly planted in her sense of herself as she has gotten older."

Washington's husband of nearly 10 years, actor and former NFL star Nnamdi Asomugha, is also one of her rocks. "I'm in my immediate truth with [him]," she says. "Those mirrors are important because they help me get back to myself." She promises to dig deeper into her identity in her first book, *Thicker Than Water*, due in September. "It's a lot about my search for security in my sense of self," she says. One thing she's determined to keep sacred, though, is the lives of her children. To date, she's never posted a picture of her and Asomugha's three kids (they have a 17-year-old daughter from his previous relationship, and share daughter Isabelle, 8, and son Caleb, 6) on her public social media. And she's careful not to divulge much about their lives, but makes it known she wants them to have thick skin. "Part of their journey is to know not everybody's going to hold your hand all the time," she says. "I try to show up as the person they need to help them be the best versions of themselves."

She's trying to show up as the person she needs, too. "Part of trusting myself is figuring out how to define what my personal success looks like for me so that I'm not just choosing everybody else's idea of what it has to look like," she says. "It's that trust of, if it's mine, it's meant to be. But I've got to stay ready to pivot and evolve and grow." **mc**

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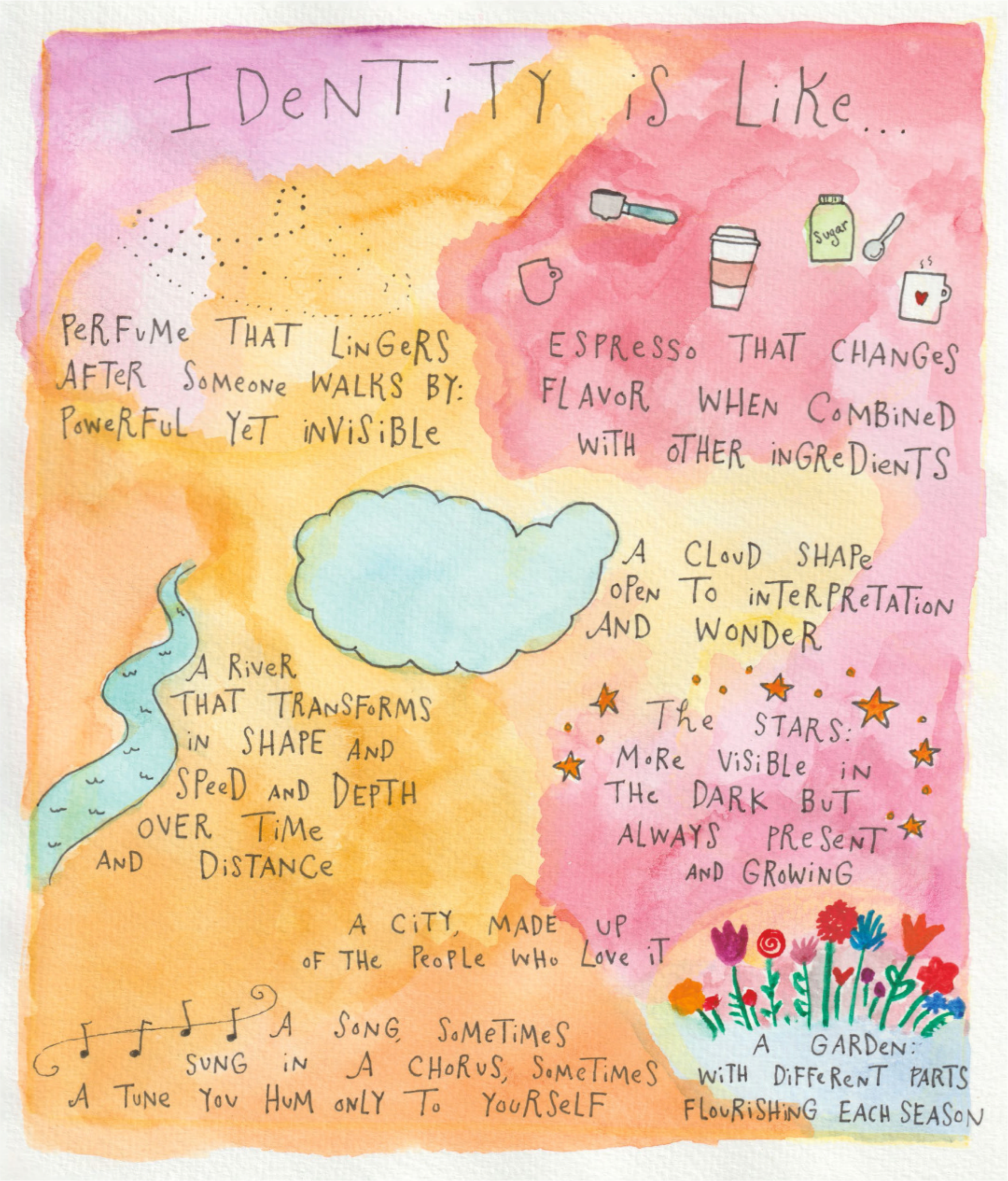
By Mari Andrew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